I Have Dreamed a Dream…

An Analysis of H.G. Wells’ Short Stories “Mr Skelmersdale in Fairyland”, “The Door in the Wall” and “A Dream of Armageddon”
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**Introduction**

Everyone has dreams; dreams of a better life, another world, an escape from reality. Sometimes it is these dreams that motivate us, that make us struggle, that keep us going. But is that all they are? What if the dreams were something more? What if we could realise those dreams and go into them?

As a writer of the late 19th, early 20th century, Herbert George Wells (1866-1946) was immensely productive, and published a multitude of short stories, novels and scientific as well as political essays. Unlike many authors of his time, Wells did not keep to one theme but produced stories of different genres. He wrote fairy tales, science fiction, fantasy novels and realistic novels, and some times used several different genres in the same stories. He was not only interested in science, but he was also a politically active socialist and he wrote many essays and letters criticising the political situation of his time. Lovat Dickson describes his work as the “annals of a social revolution written while it was happening” (4). Writing in a time of great change both socially, economically and politically, Wells became the voice of “a new world” after the First World War, even though his breakthrough with novels such as *Tono-Bungay* and *The New Machiavelli* came long before (17). His political views are often visible in his fiction. Some of his works, such as *The War of the Worlds* and *The Island of Dr Moreau* often present political or moral issues set within a scientific arena.

In 1901 he wrote the two short stories “Mr Skelmersdale in Fairyland” and “A Dream of Armageddon”, and in 1906 he wrote the short story “The Door in the Wall”. These three stories have a common theme: they all deal with the matter of dreams and the choice between personal pleasure and social responsibility. They are all stories of men who get an opportunity to realise their innermost desires and longings and they all give a glimpse of fantastic dreamworlds. This is where the similarities end and the differences begin. For, although seemingly similar, these stories differ from each other and even though the structure of the stories and the settings of the dream worlds might, at a first glance, seem very similar, there is much more here than meets the eye.

This essay intends to show that, although similar in many ways, there is a difference between “Mr Skelmersdale” and “The Door” and “A Dream” when it comes to the message and the outcome. This will be shown by examining three different aspects of the three stories: the description of the dreamland itself and how it compares to the real world of the main character, the inner struggle of the protagonist, their ultimate choice and the consequences of this choice; and finally what message the author wants to convey to the reader with the outcome of the story. There will also be an analysis of the authenticity of each story since this
is connected to Wells’s intention of showing that these stories are connected to reality, that they are meant to have an impact on us, and not be mere fictional tales.

This essay consists of three chapters: chapters one and two deal with “Mr Skelmersdale in Fairyland” and “The Door in the Wall” respectively, not following the chronology of their writing. The last chapter deals with “A Dream of Armageddon” which is the most different and complex story.

Much has been written about the immense productions of H.G. Wells. Multitudes of famous writers and critics have had their say about the novels and short stories, and even Wells himself has commented on his own work in letters and diaries. However, these three stories have for some reason been neglected by many critics, and not much has been written about them. Richard Borden and Laura Scuriatti are two among the very limited number of critics who have made an effort to analyse “The Door in the Wall” and “A Dream of Armageddon” and what these critics mostly consider is the person H.G. Wells; his political views as well as his personal life, and how this appears in the stories. Some of these interpretations also suggest psychological, mostly psychoanalytical, readings of the texts, something that has been taken into account in this essay but not to any great extent. More than anything, these critics make superficial comments on the stories, and not much more.

For “Mr Skelmersdale in Fairyland”, however, it was difficult, even after considerable effort, to find any critical material at all. There seems to be very little written about this story, which is fascinating, since much could be said about it. Therefore, it is a particular honour to be one of the few people who analyse it, since, like the other two stories, it is interesting as well as entertaining.
Chapter 1: Failing to Recognise What Is Right in Front of You

“Mr Skelmersdale in Fairyland” (1901) shows an ordinary man living an ordinary life, who is snatched away by fairies who show him their beautiful world. They offer him to join them, but he refuses their offer, not realising his mistake until it is too late.

The story is structured as a framework story built up around an inner tale. The narrator of the framework story is a writer who is staying in a small village, working on a book, when he hears of the story of Mr Skelmersdale. Usually spending time watching the rural village people in their daily habits, the narrator becomes fascinated with this story and its touch of local folklore. As he picks up bits and pieces from the villagers, he becomes determined to hear the story from the man himself. He contacts Skelmersdale and, after a bit of initial trouble, wins his confidence and is told the story. He is initially sceptical as to its authenticity, but it is apparent that he takes great interest in it. The narrator is an educated man, and Wells has chosen to make him lean towards both science and spiritualism as the book he is writing is called ‘Spiritual Pathology’. This could be a reflection on Wells himself who wrote both science fiction as well as scientific essays. This ambivalence could also explain the narrator’s initial scepticism to the story, as well as his curiosity when he says: “Nonsense! … Tell me all about it” (884). His language is educated upper-class English and the sceptical attitude as well as the curiosity reflects the view of the reader as he follows the story. Although initially sceptical, after hearing the story the narrator is convinced that Mr Skelmersdale believes the story himself and that he is “incapable of telling a lie so elaborate and sustained” (888).

As the reader reaches the inner tale of this story, he is taken back to the event in question: Mr Skelmersdale’s visit to Fairyland. However, even in this inner story, the narrator of the framework story is doing most of the telling, due to, as he puts it, Skelmersdale’s “very limited power of narration” (888). He lacks words to explain his experience and his emotions: “There was something in his eyes and manner that was too difficult for him to express in words” (898). This inability is part of the significant difference of class between the two men, and this difference is shown in more ways than this throughout the whole of the story. We see it in Skelmersdale’s language, which is Estuary English with much slang in the pronunciation: “’er ‘and on my ‘and, you know, and … a soft, warm friendly way she ‘ad, it was as much as I could do to keep my ‘ead” (892). The difference between the two is also reinforced by the many comments that the narrator makes about Skelmersdale. The narrator befriends him by exploiting his higher social position and is constantly noting the inferior level of Skelmersdale, whether it is his intelligence, his vocabulary or his “disarticulated skeleton of description” (891). This is because he considers him incapable of telling the story properly.
His opinions concern not only Skelmersdale’s language, but also his actions throughout the story as we shall see further on.

So, why cannot Mr Skelmersdale tell his own story? He is a grocer’s assistant from the village Aldington Corner, a simple person with little or no education and the reader gets the impression that he is quick to believe in fantasies and fairytales, as are the villagers around him. Therefore we end up with a double narrative where on the one hand the unimaginative Skelmersdale struggles to articulate the things he has experienced, and on the other hand there is the well-spoken narrator interpreting the other man’s story. The narrator himself explains this way of telling the story as the only possible way since Skelmersdale has a “vague and imperfect vocabulary” and is “unobservant of all minor detail” (890). Because of this, at some points the reader cannot be sure who is observing, Skelmersdale or the narrator, and it becomes difficult to tell what Skelmersdale actually experiences, since the major part of the story is filtered through the narrator. There are many passages where the narrator says “I suspect”, “I think” (891), “I have tried to get it right” (893) signifying a level of uncertainty about the story.

The dual nature of the narrative is also shown in the setting. The story takes place in Bignor and Aldington Corner, small villages in the south-east of England. Both villages are described, at great length, as dull and ordinary; there is “the usual village shop, post-office, telegraph wire on its brow, zinc pans and brushes outside” (884). Bignor is where our narrator meets Skelmersdale and Aldington Corner is where Skelmersdale used to work, before the Fairyland adventure, in a “very similar little shop”, tying the two places together, almost as if they were one location (886). The action of the inner story, however, takes place outside Aldington, on Aldington Knoll, a “tumulus of some great pre-historic chieftain” and it is clear that there is a world of difference between the Knoll and the village. The village is a calm, ordinary place whereas the Knoll “stands out, bare and bleak under the sky” (889). It is an old burial mound, a place surrounded by mythical power and strange rumours. John Hammond discusses the descriptive skill of Wells and notes that in this story the scenery is described with an “intensity and clarity of vision” and this poetic beauty is something that Wells is extremely good at (68-9). There is an extensive description of the surroundings of the Knoll, possibly to anchor it to the world surrounding Skelmersdale and to further authenticate it to the reader:

Eastwards one sees along the hills to Hythe … across the Channel to where … the great white lights by Gris Nez and Boulogne wink and pass and shine. Westward lies the whole tumbled valley of the Weald … and the valley of the Stour opens the Downs in the north
to interminable hills beyond Wye. All Romney Marsh lies southward at one’s feet, Dymnchurch and Romney and Lydd, Hastings and its hill are in the middle distance, and the hills multiply vaguely far beyond where Eastbourne rolls up on Beachy Head.

And out upon all this it was that Skelmersdale wandered (Wells, 889)
The descriptions of the surroundings enhance the image of Skelmersdale’s journey at the same time as this image is very specific and shows a precise location, not to mention that this is also a good example of Wells poetic skill.

The narrator also thinks it quite possible that Skelmersdale’s visit took place on Midsummer night, even though this seems like a very slim chance, since Skelmersdale himself has “never thought of the date, and he cannot be sure within a week or so” (888). He also refers to the setting in terms such as “Jupiter”, “sepulchre”, “twilight”, “bleak”, “adventure”, and “moonrise”, all of which add to the mysteriousness of Skelmersdale’s experience (889).

As Skelmersdale goes out into this landscape, sulking and grieving after an argument with his betrothed Millie, he ends up on the Knoll where he falls asleep. When he wakes up, there are magical creatures around him, and they bring him into Fairyland (889-90). Fairies or elves, animals and insects populate the world that Mr Skelmersdale enters and he is enchanted by everything he sees. Not only the creatures, but the scenery of this world is captivating, and the forest itself is denser and darker. The thickets, the lights from the glow-worms, the air, the clouded sky and even the darkness itself are surrounded by magic. There are giant kingcups, moss branches and the smell of violets (890-92).

There are some allusions to the food and music of Fairyland. Skelmersdale himself has trouble describing it, but manages to describe the food with the words: “you should have tasted it!” and the music as “a little musical box” (891). We might assume that the food in the real world would never taste so delicious, and that there is no music here that compares to the elf song of Fairyland. There is also amusement in Fairyland, and Skelmersdale talks of bathing, dancing, games and “elvish love-making”. However, there is little told of these activities (892).

Skelmersdale is royally entertained in Fairyland, most of all by a woman: the lovely Fairy Queen who is the “chief personage of his memory and tale” (891). Here the reader sees the difference between the two narrators mentioned above. Skelmersdale talks about “the way she moved” but “cannot express” much else, even though this is his most vivid memory (891). The narrator fills in the gaps by telling of the “demure joyousness radiated from this Lady” (891) and her “radiant sweetness shining through the jungle” (894). She is small, as the rest of
the elves, and very beautiful, dressed in green and silver and decorated with jewels and flowers. She is “smelling of violets” (892) and her kiss is described as “something magic” (893).

The reader and the narrator quickly realise that the Fairy Queen has a keen interest in Skelmersdale: “there can be no doubt that the Fairy Lady made love to [him]” says the narrator (892). She courts him, telling him that she has fallen in love with him and that this is the reason for him being in Fairyland in the first place. The narrator speaks of their “wonderful intimacy” and they talk of love for “days and days” (893). At one point, the Fairy Queen says that she will give him everything he wants, and asks him to kiss her (892).

His response to her actions and her words is ambivalent; he seems unwilling to submit to her wishes, at the same time that he is clearly stricken by her beauty, her grace and her voice. Nevertheless, he “set himself to resist her” leading to the struggle of their brief relationship. The reader knows that, as Skelmersdale enters Fairyland, he is engaged to Millie and he also has in mind “a little shop of his own” that he plans for (892). This is, of course, what is holding him back from the magic of the Fairy Queen’s love. He is honest and respectable and tells her he is engaged, tells her everything about his Millie and about his commercial plans (892).

However, she asks him a second time and after “pretending not to hear her” the first time, he submits to her wish “like a fool” and they kiss (893). This comment of Skelmersdale’s is an indicator of things to come, when he says it as an older, wiser person. In the words of the narrator, “it marked a turning point”, and this is where Skelmersdale’s life starts to come apart. The Fairy Queen tells him that he cannot stay, as he is already engaged, and must return to the world of men. He is already in love with her, but as he is in “a sort of stupefaction” his reaction does not show until much later. We understand that he is “hypnotised … by his earthly position” and “blind to everything … but this wonderful intimacy” (893). As a farewell gesture, the Fairy Queen takes him to the treasure chests of Fairyland, where he is given all the gold he can carry and, in tears, she leaves him.

This is when he realises the full extent of his experiences and the emotional impact of leaving the magical land and its Lady. He runs after her, shouting her name, while elves, gnomes and will o’ the wisps follow him and harass him, shouting “fairy love and fairy gold”. He shouts to them that he does not want their gold only the Fairy Lady, and tries to get rid of the gold that they are forcing upon him. He is bewildered and heartbroken and at last he runs into a swamp, stumbles and falls, and is back in the real world (894-5).
Back in reality, he is unhappy and confused and cannot focus on his daily affairs. He discovers to his surprise that he has been gone for three weeks, and he is now miserable without the love of the Fairy Lady. He fantasises about her and “how [he] wanted her!”.

He feels that the people around him are “big, you know, and coarse … and loud” and the brilliance of the sun pains his eyes (896). He is so obsessed with the dream of this Lady that he starts making mistakes in orders and can neither eat nor sleep. “Daft I was and miserable” he says, as he tries to explain the mix of humiliation and sorrow that he feels (897).

Furthermore, his interest in Millie is gone. She was the source of his initial troubles as he went out to Aldington Knoll, but as he re-enters the real world, she has become “changed”. She “was just nothing” he says, and cannot “make out whatever [he] had seen in ‘er ever” (896). She eventually marries her cousin and, as he tells the narrator this, Skelmersdale stares into the tablecloth. The narrator first takes this as a sign of regret or sorrow for his loss, but quickly realises that Skelmersdale is daydreaming about the Fairy Lady.

There are, in the long term, two different levels of his troubles and his sorrow. On the surface level, he is mocked by the people around him, and eventually leaves town to get away from “the fuss” (886). The townspeople do believe his story “like Bible truth” but they taunt and remind him of it nonetheless, saying things such as: “none of your fairy flukes!” (885). This hurts Skelmersdale as the memory of his lost love of the Fairy Queen torments him and he longs for the world and the love that he has lost. Even though he moves to Bignor, the people there hear about his story and he is again a man haunted by the memories of his dream.

Carol Silver presents another aspect of this idea, that Skelmersdale is dead to the rest of society. He has visited fairyland, which is often compared to the land of the dead, where the souls of the living have taken shape as fairies. The people around Skelmersdale might be afraid of him, because of his experience in the underworld, no matter how pleasant he thought it to be (41).

The second level, the deeper effect of his experience, becomes apparent a good number of years later, when the narrator meets him Skelmersdale is still troubled by the story from his past but his feelings of the experience have changed. He still feels a longing for the company of the Fairy Queen and the magic of Fairyland and the narrator observes “sorrow” and “anguish” in him and is surprised that this ordinary man can suffer such emotion.

Skelmersdale wants to go back and tells of wandering up upon Aldington Knoll, even in the rain, trying to get back into Fairy Land and the mistress of his dreams. However, he is not as desperate as he was during the time after his adventure. His initial desperation has changed into melancholy of a sort, and he is notably a calmer, older man. The narrator sees his “sorrow
still, though now, indeed, with a time blunted anguish”. “One gets talking” Skelmersdale says at the very end of the story, smiles and leaves both the reader and the narrator with a mixed sense of sadness and acceptance (898).

The narrator tells of a man who is in fact too ordinary to be able to cope with the fantastic things he sees. The story seems, on the surface, to be about the choice between the real world of toil and responsibilities, and the dream world of wonders and pleasures. However, Skelmersdale never struggles between choosing the real world and his Millie or the Fairy Queen. A closer look reveals that he immediately resists the latter, and although attracted by her, never doubts his choice of leaving, until she is gone. He is loyal and dutiful to his lady, but the main reason for his actions must be that he is too simple and too slow-minded for this magnificent world, too stupid to realise the opportunity he is given, and this leads him back to his reality, his simple world and its troubles, its hardships and its boredom. One can question, as does the narrator, how something as amazing as this could happen to such an ordinary person. This leads to the question of authenticity, whether or not the story is true. The narrator doubts the story before he has heard it himself, as will the reader. So is Skelmersdale making the story up or not?

Viewing it from a psychological perspective, the sexual tension of his experience might be an indicator that Skelmersdale’s normal life is loveless and tedious, and that his fantasies come true in Fairyland. Indeed, many of his experiences in this magical land could be interpreted this way: he is the centre of attention of all the elves, he has the admiration of a beautiful woman who wants to give him everything and is deeply in love with him, and he experiences riches in food and music as well as in gold like he has probably never experienced them before. Therefore, his experience could be viewed as a compensatory dream episode to escape from the dullness of his ordinary life.

However, Millie believes him, and so do the other villagers; likewise the narrator is in the end convinced that Skelmersdale is not telling a lie, since he is too simple to make up such a story. Hence, there seems to be no reason to doubt him. This leads to the problem of the double narrative and the question whether or not the narrator can be trusted. The double narrative with the narrator’s assumptions and guessing could be a way of undercutting his reliability. Nevertheless, Wells gives his narrator good credentials as an educated author committed to both science and theology and he lets him go through some doubts at the beginning of the tale to end up convinced. Presumably, so should we.

The discussion of authenticity comes from the view that this story is a realistic story. Naturally one would not assume that a story with elves and magic would be perceived as
particularly realistic but Wells has been able to create a story where fantasy and realism mix very well. This mixing of genres is something that will be an important feature in all the three stories presented in this essay and here Wells has created a magical adventure and placed it within a realistic story. Besides the settings and the characters, this dualism can be seen for instance in the title of the story, which is as dualistic on this subject as one can possibly get without exaggerating. If he had wanted to make it any easier for us, Wells could have named his story “Mr Ordinary in Magic Land”. For what purpose this dualism has been used, why Wells mixes these genres, is hard to tell. Perhaps he wanted to communicate to his readers that magical things happen all around us; that ordinary people might experience fantastic things but they are too ordinary to notice and unable to keep their happiness, and lose it whether they want to or not. However, the message that comes out in this story is more than this. Wells shows us that in order to win our heart’s desire, we must risk things and realise what is really worth something: life and love. We cannot worry about money or capital, like Skelmersdale does. He is just too simple to do the right thing, to reach out and grab the good things that are there. But what if this fantastic thing were to happen to someone who is not a simple man? This question opens a new door leading to another story.
Chapter 2: Knocking on Heaven’s Door

“The Door in the Wall” is a story of a man of great ambition who is given the choice to pursue his ambitions and his worldly responsibility or to go into a world of joy and happiness and leave the rest of humanity to deal with the real world.

Just as “Mr Skelmersdale in Fairyland”, “The Door in the Wall” also has a framework structure built around an inner tale. The framework story is narrated by Mr Redmond, an educated, middle-aged man, and the inner tale by Mr Lionel Wallace, a similarly well educated politician who is an old school friend of Redmond’s. The reader is introduced to the main character when Redmond gives an account of a meeting and a private conversation they have had one evening when Wallace has told his remarkable story of a magical door. Wallace reveals his secret prompted by Redmond’s disappointment in what he refers to as his friend’s “slackness and unreliability” (145).

Unlike “Mr Skelmersdale”, this story has been divided into four chapters, each dealing with different experiences of Wallace’s visions of the door. From the first to the fourth chapter the reader is taken in a circle, the first chapter beginning with and the last chapter ending with the lone narrator pondering the story he has been told and the man who has told it. Chapter One introduces us to the narrator Redmond, the main character Wallace and his first experience of the door and the fantastic garden that lies behind it. The second chapter deals with a slightly older Wallace and his second vision of the door. In Chapter Three Wallace grows from an adolescent youngster to a middle-aged man. This chapter also covers five more encounters with the door and his reactions to it. The fourth chapter takes the reader back to the study of Redmond as he thinks about his friend’s story and the consequences of it.

This story also takes place in two different settings, one ordinary and one magical, just as the settings of Skelmersdale’s story. The first setting is the city of London and the different parts of it where Wallace goes during his life. There are a few descriptions of the city and the first glimpse the reader gets of Wallace is when, at the age of five, he is standing in West Kensington: “he recalls a number of mean, dirty shops, and particularly that of a plumber and decorator with a dusty disorder of earthenware pipes, sheet lead, ball taps, pattern books of wall paper, and tins of enamel” (147). Another glimpse shows “a long grey street in West Kensington, in that chill of afternoon before the lamps are lit” (151). These images all show the city as cold, grey and dull and this is how Wallace views his own life. The other setting is that of the enchanted garden with a “warmer, more penetrating and mellower light, with a faint clear gladness in its air, and wisps of sun-touched cloud in the blueness of its sky” (148).
It is a place of magic and joy and it is clear that this is no ordinary garden as will be shown further on.

First, however, we must deal with the narrative. Although these two stories have similar double narratives as well as double settings, the main characters are very different. As we remember from Chapter One, the two narrators in “Mr Skelmersdale” are very different. In “The Door”, the two characters are friends and they know each other from before. They are also educated men, Londoners, who have done well in life and therefore belong to the same social class. The major differences between the two characters that the reader finds in the Skelmersdale’s story are here nowhere to be found. This divergence between the stories is taken even further by the statement that Wallace is not only an equal, but indeed Redmond’s superior both at school and also later in life, making this situation quite the opposite of the relationship in “Mr Skelmersdale” (145-146). The narrator is inferior to the main character instead of the other way around.

The narrator goes to some effort to present Wallace’s honesty and intelligence: he is about forty years old and has had a very successful life in politics, being expected to join the new Cabinet. He is a man to be trusted (which could explain why he takes offence at the accusation of “slackness and unreliability”) and this is something that further validates his story. “He left me in a blaze of scholarships and brilliant performance” the narrator says about Wallace, and further explains that he was no slouch himself but “made a fair average running” (146).

There is an obvious difference between the main characters Skelmersdale and Wallace: They are on the opposite side of the class scale with all the differences that follow, but they are also two very different people. Wallace is clever and curious where as Skelmersdale is slow-minded and dull. However, Redmond also points out Wallace’s struggles with his story as “it was very difficult for Wallace to give me his full sense of that garden into which he came” (147) and he also has problems remembering some of the details of it (149).

Nevertheless, it must be taken into account that Wallace was five years old at the time and is recollecting the events thirty or forty years later.

To find out what has happened to this extraordinary man, the reader is taken into the inner tale of the story. Unlike Skelmersdale, Wallace is more than capable of telling his own story as he is well educated and very well spoken, and he is given much opportunity to tell his own tale. In this story, it is more clearly a case of re-telling, rather than re-producing as was the case in the story of Skelmersdale. This framework narrator is more humble to his old friend and it is clear that in this case there will be no problem of authenticity because of an
incompetent story-teller or an over-imaginative narrator. Indeed, Redmond goes to great lengths to emphasise Wallace’s reliability as a narrator, how well he tells the story and that he “did to the very best of his ability strip the truth of his secret to me” (144-5).

The inner story covers Wallace’s life story from his first encounter with the door at the age of five to the evening when the story-telling takes place when both men are in their forties. Young Wallace is a lonely boy, an only child and his mother being dead, he is under the care of a governess and a strict father. One day he wanders the streets bored and dull and ends up in front of the door. He immediately feels its “attraction” but does not go in, because “it was unwise or it was wrong of him” (147). At first he walks away from the door, but confronted with the sordid reality of West Kensington he decides to rush through the door. Connecting the story to Freudian ideas, Richard Borden argues that Wallace needs the door as a means of creating a happier childhood as a compensation for the one he has had in reality and that the reappearing of the door symbolises Wallace’s own desires to go into this childhood state of ease and lack of responsibility (324). This is a good idea, but it is difficult to believe that Wallace would create such a fiction as compensation for his childhood, while still a child. However, this interpretation could easily be used for the door’s appearance later in Wallace’s life.

As he enters the door, Wallace finds a garden which makes the West Kensington he leaves behind him literally disappear. The garden gives a “sense of lightness and good happening and well-being” and “something in the sight of it … made all its colour clean and perfect and subtly luminous” (147). Richard Hauer Costa calls it a garden of “peace, delight” and “beauty” and argues that it is the opposite of Wallace’s real life (35). One can only agree that this is the case. The garden is of an immense size “stretch[ing] far and wide, this way and that”. There is a wide avenue lined with delphinium leading between big, dark trees to “marble seats of honour and statuary” (148-9). Wallace is filled with joy and finds everything in this garden wonderful and beautiful. Laura Scuriatti argues that this garden is Wells’s way of showing the ideal London as he wanted it to be, that through this utopian garden Wells created his utopian London (6). Wells being politically active as well as a bit of a radical, this is a very likely theory.

The garden is very different from the forest of “Mr Skelmersdale” in that the forest is rougher, darker and wilder, whereas the garden is more ordered, a wide avenue and lined flowers. At the same time there is also an avenue in Skelmersdale’s forest “a glow-worm avenue” (890) but the forest itself seems darker, perhaps because there are a lot of lights everywhere and because the story takes place at night. The forest of “Mr Skelmersdale” is
wild, dark and gloomy with little thicket lights and a sense of mystery about it. The ordered

garden of “The Door” appears brighter, being a place of daytime, light and magical happiness.

The creatures in Wallace’s garden differ much from the ones in Fairyland. Two “velvety”

panthers are playing with a ball as Wallace enters, he finds that they are tame and he pets

them lovingly. They are curious and friendly towards him, and purr as he strokes their ears

(148). There are also other creatures and people in this garden. A Capuchin monkey, “very

clean, with … kindly, hazel eyes” jumps up on his shoulder, and “tame and friendly” white
doves sit along the avenue (149). Skelmersdale never finds beasts such as these in his

Fairyland. He encounters animals, but they are smaller, less exotic and are kept for riding and

not for petting in the same way. They are insects, larvae and creatures that are viewed as low

ranked in the world of men unlike the mighty panther and the friendly monkey. Moreover,

both the monkey and the two panthers immediately become Wallace’s pets and he says that

“it was as though they welcomed me home” (148).

Furthermore, there are humans in Wallace’s dream land, unlike Fairyland, all “beautiful

and kind”. He also finds two playmates that seem to be closer to his own age, and they play

games that he enjoys, even though he later on cannot remember them (149-150). All these

people give him a feeling of “homecoming” and he is “reminded of happy things that had in

some strange way been overlooked” (148-9). The narrator is very careful to show the joy and

the good feeling that comes over Wallace as he enters this world, not only in his reaction to

the world itself but also the inhabitants there. This feeling of well-being is mirrored in “Mr

Skelmersdale” but in the case of Skelmersdale, the feeling of joy comes from the Fairy

Queen, and less from the things surrounding them. Skelmersdale is hypnotized by the world

around him and the woman he meets, while Wallace remains in control of all of his faculties.

For Wallace also encounters a woman in his dreamland. He even encounters two women,

very different from one another. The first woman or girl that he meets is tall and fair and

smiles at him. She has “pleasant lines” a “finely-modelled chin” and a “sweet face”. He

instantly feels a sensation of “rightness” and feels that he has come home to this girl (148-9).
The other woman he encounters is “dark … with a grave, pale face and dreamy eyes, a

sombre woman … like a shadow” (150). Several times he talks of her “very gentle and grave”

face and she is also referred to as “the grave mother”. She carries a book in which she shows

young Wallace “not pictures, you understand, but realities”, all that has happened in his life

up to the point where he stands outside the door. The woman tries to prevent Wallace from

seeing beyond this point but he forces her “with all [his] childish strength” and then sees

himself standing in “a long grey street in West Kensington” and realises that the garden is
gone and he is back in reality. He weeps bitterly for the loss of the garden and his playmates and for being back in “harsh reality” (150-1). It is apparent that he immediately realises the impact that this loss will have upon his life, and that the childish strength refers to his mind as well as his muscles. This passage is symbolic for his struggle with life, as his childish curiosity to find out what will happen is the same curiosity that later in life will not let him go through the door again because he wants to find out what reality has to offer.

The two women appear in some aspects to be opposites of each other: the first is a fair girl, the other a dark woman; the first happy and talkative, the other silent and grave. One interpretation is that they are representations of the different sides of Wallace’s lost mother. Concerning the women, Bernard Bergonzi also sees the act of disobeying the father and entering the door as an act of rebellion and he further claims “The Door” to be an oedipal story with Wallace having to choose between his mother and father, his mother representing the dream world and his father reality (qtd in Deborah Williams, 1-2). Williams further compares Wallace’s situation to the Jungian idea of the two aspects of the psyche and thereby also argues that Wallace’s choice is a choice between the masculine and the feminine (1-2). The issue here certainly is choice, which is one of the central issues of this essay, and there are many choices to be interpreted as well as many ways to interpret them. These two theories are definitely plausible, even though Wells’s view of the artistic and political life which will be considered later on, could be considered a more believable interpretation.

There are some similarities between the dreamland experiences of the two stories: there is a main protagonist who is a lonely person not content with his reality. In a state of trouble and unrest, this protagonist goes out into unfamiliar territory (in “Skelmersdale” it is Aldington Knoll, in “The Door” West Kensington) and enters a dreamland. The dreamlands of both stories are gardens and contain both animals and people (if elf-people). Both men are gladdened by what they see in their respective dream-worlds, they leave them unwillingly, and it grieves both of them.

Back in reality, Wallace is devastated by the loss of his dreamland and his friends as well as the fact that nobody believes his story. He is punished for lying and ”everyone was forbidden to listen to me” he explains as he remembers the feelings of loneliness and sadness. This becomes even clearer when in Chapter Two he is confronted with the door a second time and tells a couple of boys (bullies, as it turns out) at school about his discovery. They may or may not believe him at first, but they listen to him and he is “a little flattered to have the attention of these big fellows” and he becomes “red-eared and excited” (155). This shows how he is, as he says himself: “a lonely little boy” (149) as he ‘sells’ “a sacred secret” to a
pack of bullying boys for the sake of having someone listening to as well as believing in him (155). When he tries to show them the door, he cannot find it again and they beat him up and abandon him, and he is again left alone.

During the course of his life he encounters the door again and again, a total of seven times. During these different times, he goes from schoolboy, to adolescent, to grown man. Initially, as he sees the door again he does not give it much thought. He recognises it, but does not feel the same attraction as he did the first time he saw it. The second time he sees it again he is on his way to school and he seems to remember “the attraction of the door mainly as another obstacle to [his] overmastering determination to get to school” (153). This example well describes his ambiguous feelings connected to these later encounters with the door. The connecting factor of all these times is that he is on his way to a meeting that will in some way change his life. Going through the door will result in him having to give up some great opportunity or responsibility. This could be the love of a woman, his responsibility to his father or a scholarship that will further his career. Roslynn Haynes wisely argues that this choice between the garden and reality is a choice between the practical real world and the aesthetic beauty of the imagination (49-50). Bergonzi makes a comparison to Wells himself, arguing that in this choice between worlds, we can see the choice between the two natures of the writer: the fictional or the real world narrative (qtd in Hauer Costa, 36). “The claims of life were imperative”, Wallace says as he explains why he repeatedly fails to enter the door (158). However, for each time he has the same explanation even though the individual reason might be different: “I do not see how I could have done otherwise then” (159).

There is a difference in this ongoing choice from Skelmersdale’s who encounters his dream-world only once and never gets another chance to come back, even though he tries. Wallace has several opportunities to give up his social responsibility to go and live in his dream-world instead, but he does not take them. For some reason or other, he always chooses to stay in the real world. Therefore, the two characters are in different situations: Skelmersdale does not get a second chance, and Wallace who does get several chances never seizes them. Bergonzi again points to Wells’s career and his choice between writing fiction or scientific novels and the many shifts between these two genres that the writer made (qtd in Hauer Costa, 36).

In the long run however, there is a change in Wallace, and the door starts looking more and more attractive. He longs for his garden: “I’ve made a great sacrifice” he says after missing one of the chances to enter it, choosing his duty to his country. These experiences leave him bitter and grieving. He starts to wander through London in the hope of seeing the
door again but cannot find it. If he finds it, he “will go in, out of this dust and heat, out of this dry glitter of vanity, out of these toilsome futilities”, he tells Redmond (158). Hammond argues that the door symbolises an escape for Wallace from everything that he has come to despise about his life and that this is a classic Wellsian theme (74).

When he speaks to Redmond about these encounters and why he has failed to enter the door again, Wallace starts to minimize the reasons that, at the time, seemed very important to him: “a thousand inconceivable petty worldlinesses weighed with me in that crisis” he says, as he has chosen to advance his career and the fate of the Cabinet instead of entering the door. He starts to despair of ever seeing the door again: “Here I am … and my chance has gone from me … I am left now to work it out” (159). Finally, he becomes so desolate that he is unable to work, much like Skelmersdale at his loss of Fairyland. “This loss is destroying me” Wallace says to Redmond, “for ten weeks nearly now, I have done no work at all” (160).

Another thing that the reader finds out about is his lack of interest in women, which is similar to Skelmersdale who likewise did not care about his sweetheart after his experience in Fairyland (886). In Wallace’s case, a woman “who had loved him greatly” explains that “suddenly … the interest goes out of him. He forgets you. He doesn’t care a rap for you” (145).

There is a difference, however, between the long-term effect on Skelmersdale and the long term effect on Wallace. Wallace seems to become more and more miserable as if “some thin tarnish has spread over [his] world” (157). Skelmersdale, on the other hand, appears to accept his fate at the end of his story, or at least his anguish is blunted. Unlike Skelmersdale, Wallace has the opportunity several times, but, as has been shown here, he does not take it.

There are two possible endings to this story, and Wells leaves it to the reader to interpret how the story actually ends. Wallace becomes more and more grieved and in the end he leaps through what he believes to be his doorway to eternal happiness and falls to his death. The reader is left with the narrator to try to figure out if this ending is a positive or negative one for Wallace. Either Wallace has been mentally disturbed and has met with a tragic end at the bottom of an excavation as part of a delusion that he has been suffering from all his life, or he has been given a last chance of happiness and has taken it, returning to his beloved garden.

Either way, the two stories have different outcomes: Skelmersdale survives his ordeals and his later agony whereas Wallace does not. Furthermore, as stated earlier, Wallace never learns to cope with his loss, something that Skelmersdale seems to do. Perhaps the difference lies in that fact that Skelmersdale is too ignorant to realise his desire for his Fairy Queen, or
perhaps Wallace is reminded again and again of his failure to choose his dreamworld, something which drives him into desperation.

So how does Redmond interpret it? “My mind is darkened with questions and riddles” he says (160). He is remembering his friend and pondering over the way his life has suddenly ended. Wallace has found what, to him, appeared to be his door, stepped through it, and fallen to his death in a construction site. As in “Mr Skelmersdale” this narrator is also initially critical of his friend’s story. Indeed, as he starts narrating the story, he is very doubtful about it: “I saw it all as frankly incredible” (144). As he re-tells it, he becomes more and more uncertain of his own doubts and by the end of the story he does not know what to believe about the story itself. Thinking back, he doubts the story and in the light of day sees it as impossible. However, as with the Skelmersdale narrator, he comes around, and believes that “Wallace did to the very best of his ability strip the truth of his secret to me”. He goes on to ensure the reader that Wallace is such a good, dutiful and trustworthy person that he has got over any previous doubts (144-5). Thus, according to Redmond, Wallace is telling the truth, but this does not answer the question of whether or not Wallace was deluded.

Even though both narrators believe that the incident is true, the theory presented in the analysis of “Mr Skelmersdale”, that the experience might be a compensatory dream for things unfulfilled in real life, is applicable here too. Wallace is a lonely boy and the people he meets in his dream world compensate for a loving family he has never had and a mother he has never known. They fill him with a feeling of homecoming and they are kind to him and make him happy “by the touch of their hands, by the welcome and love in their eyes” (148-9). They resemble a family, and the grave woman remind him of a “grave mother” (151). He sees the door at times when he has difficulties in his life or when he’s confronted with choices in life that are difficult to make and situations where he must prove his worth. The door becomes a way of escape from something “toilsome” and “cheap” and thus, the perfect substitute for life (158).

It should be mentioned that he does not always feel that life is dreary, but in his youth finds it “bright and interesting … full of meaning and opportunity”, so much so that the memory of the garden seems “gentle and remote” (157). Nevertheless, the memory of the door and the garden grows stronger as he grows older and reality becomes less important. Patrick Parrinder views the story as an “individual release … and unforeseen rebellion against society and its appointed roles” (77). I cannot agree with this fully, as I have trouble seeing Wallace’s life as a struggle against society. Wallace’s struggle is not so much between him and his society as it is within himself. Agreeing with previous critics and myself, however,
Parrinder views the door as an escape into beauty from a world of toil. The door is something that lets Wallace escape his dreary life (77). This escape is from the world, but it is the world that Wallace has built around himself, and not the world that society has built for him.

Redmond also questions whether or not the door ever existed, except in Wallace’s mind. Nevertheless, he seems convinced that “[Wallace] had, in truth, an abnormal gift, and a sense, something … a secret … passage into another and altogether more beautiful world”. He ponders, concerning his friend’s death, over what is in fact real and about the perspective of the mind: ”by our daylight standard [Wallace] walked out of security into darkness, danger, and death. But did he see it like that?” (161). Redmond is convinced that Wallace was not deluded. Further indication of the story’s authenticity is presented by Scuriatti who argues that the book that shows “realities” and the two men’s skill in mathematics indicate the author’s desire to prove the realism of the story as well as the rational minds of the characters (3). Again, Wells does his best to convince us that the story presented is authentic, and the question is why?

Like Skelmersdale, “The Door” is a story that mixes two different genres: a children’s fairytale and a realistic story. The name of the story refers to the link between the two worlds and the two genres and the barrier that separates them. The same divider within Wallace refuses to let him have parts of both worlds, but forces him to choose. Like “Mr Skelmersdale” this story shows by its mixing of genres that the door exists for everyone and that magic is just a threshold away. What will happen if we are aware of this fact but still refuse to grasp the opportunity of happiness is shown by Wallace.

So what is Wells’s message in this story? Is it trying to show that we will not be happier chasing the dream, that we should be content with our reality? Probably not. Rather, this story shows us that the opportunity of happiness is out there, and that we must seize it when we can. It also shows us that we may get more than one chance to do this, but if we fail, as time goes by, we will start to suffer for it. There might be a double outcome in this story, but either way, Wallace has come out of this world and into heaven or his dreamworld, two places that might not be all too different.

Looking at both these stories, Wells has shown that people from both sides of the class spectrum are unsatisfied with their lives and long for something else. This might be something they have encountered once or something they experience frequently, and sometimes this longing is stronger and sometimes it is weaker, but it is always present. The mixing of genres again show this idea of magic all around us and the joy that can be found if we take time away
from our responsibilities to appreciate this magic, regardless if we are rich or poor, slow or intelligent.

Like Skelmersdale, Wallace is unable to do the right thing, to grasp the chance of happiness when presented with it; and as these characters live their lives, they are haunted by the memory of their dreams and the beauty they miss, and they suffer in the reality they have to deal with. Returning to the theories of Jung, Alfred Ward sees the door as a Jungian archetype, something that is common to everyone. Ward views the door as every person’s way out, as a resting place from everyday work, but says that we postpone using it, thinking we will use it later, until it is too late (139-141). But what if one has gone through the door, stayed in Fairyland and do not accept one’s social responsibility? This leads us to another dream, one of Armageddon.
Chapter 3: The Beauty of the Dream and the Beast of Reality

“A Dream of Armageddon” tells the story of a man who night after night enters a dream world where he lives in pleasure and beauty. However, darkness creeps into this beauty and the dream becomes a nightmare. Like the other stories, this one also has a framework structure built up around an inner structure containing a double narrative. In “A Dream of Armageddon” the framework story takes place on a train where we meet an anonymous narrator and a man called Cooper who are having a conversation about dreams. Cooper tells the narrator about a recurring dream, set in another time and place, which haunts his sleep. The story shifts several times between these two worlds, Cooper’s dream and the real world, both when Cooper tells us about waking up and when we come back to the narrator on the train. This framework story ends as the train comes to a halt at its final destination.

Unlike the other two stories, the reader does not find out much about this first narrator, and he remains anonymous. The few clues that the reader gets about him is that he is an educated man, as he is reading a book called *Dream States*, and appears to be well read on the subject of dreams and psychology (1010-11). There is essentially no need for a more detailed description of this narrator because he is not very significant to the story. He is needed as a bridge to bring Cooper’s story to the reader and to anchor the story to the real world, and he is used as a means to authenticate the story, but Cooper does his own story-telling.

The main character is, in this story, a complicated one. Skelmersdale and Wallace both experience wonderful things in their dreamland, but they both stay the same persons. In the real world, the main character Cooper is a fifty-three-year-old man from Liverpool, well educated and with a strong personality, working as a solicitor (1022). He explains that in his dream, his name is no longer Cooper, but Hedon. Hedon is a statesman, “a big man, the sort of man men come to trust in, to group themselves about”, and has been the leader of a country and famous not only in his own country, but throughout the whole world (1015). The name “Hedon” is presumably derived from the word ‘hedonist’, indicating the protagonist’s desires for personal pleasure. There are interesting similarities to be found when comparing Hedon and Wallace and their views of life. They are both middle-aged and they both view their careers as something that has become a necessary evil and as ultimately pointless. Cooper claims that Hedon’s work was a “big laborious … monstrous political game amongst intrigues and betrayals, speech and agitation” (1015). This mirrors Wallace’s talk of “a thousand inconceivable petty worldlinesses” (159).

There is, of course, more to Cooper than this. He is a lonely person who has had a family – mother, wife and daughters but he speaks of them in the past tense as if they are no longer a
part of his life. He is also an intelligent and competent man, even though he may look tired and troubled to the narrator. His memory is strong and detailed and he tells his story well. The narrator tries to ask questions at the beginning, but Cooper becomes annoyed: “You must not interrupt or you will put me out” (1013). There is evidence that Cooper feels superior to the narrator and he says that “I cannot expect you to understand the shades and complications … I had it all – down to the smallest details” (1015). Cooper twice asks the narrator if his story seems “bosh” or “mad”, but he does not seem to doubt his own sanity; he is just nervous that the narrator will (1013).

The settings of “A Dream” are structurally different to “Mr Skelmersdale” and “The Door”, first and foremost in one important sense, and that is that the framework setting, the real world where the narrator meets Cooper, is less important and less developed. It seems simply a way to tie the story to a setting familiar to the reader. The real world is used as a comparison to the dream world: “‘This — (he indicated the landscape that went streaming by the window) ‘seems unreal in comparison’” (1011).

Nevertheless, like the two previous stories, there are two important settings here, but in this story they are both set within the inner structure in Hedon’s dream world. The first setting is the island of Capri off the coast of Italy. Hedon wakes up a couple of hundred years from now, on a couch in a loggia on the paradise island, not knowing exactly what year it is (1022). This island consists of a single, enormous luxury hotel with all the comfort one could wish for. “A pleasure city” he calls it and describes many things such as falling coastlines, warm sunrises and many more aspects of this wonderful place. Behind the island there are many floating hotels in the bay and from the centre of the island, a grand mountain called Monte Solaro rises up. “Solaro straight and tall, flushed and golden crested, like a beauty throned” he says, and goes on to describe the warm sun, and the sea “all dotted with sailing boats” (1016-17).

There are also many other people at the hotel in Capri and they all know of Hedon since his days as a famous politician. They are beautiful, “dressed in splendid colours crowned with flowers” dancing and singing, eating and drinking, and they are all happy in their paradise world (1018). These people are friendly and they seem to enjoy life and the pleasures of the island in a hedonistic fashion, bathing and swimming in the afternoons and dancing and feasting in the evenings. Hedon explains that “the music was different … it was infinitely richer and more varied than any music that has ever come to me awake” much like Skelmersdale’s food and fairy music which was also unlike anything found in reality (1018).
The other setting is the world that Hedon has left in favour of this paradise island. He has come from the north, unspecified exactly where, but his name, the names of the other people of the north that he speaks of, and the way he describes his former life as “dust and ashes”, lead the thoughts to an industrial landscape; perhaps London or another industrial city at the turn of the 20th century. “The north”, by its description and the fact that it has no name, gives the reader the feeling of coldness and unfamiliarity, and a sense of something filthy and unfriendly, possibly because it is compared to the friendly and warm Capri.

The similarities to the other two dream worlds are that Capri contains beautiful images of nature and gives a general feeling of goodness and well-being. Other than that, this dream world is different from the other two stories in many aspects: Hedon’s dream world contains both good and bad sides, which Skelmersdale’s and Wallace’s do not. Furthermore, the setting for Hedon’s dream world is in fact real; Capri exists, Monte Solaro is a real mountain on the island and the places look in real life as they do in the story, although the story takes place a couple of centuries into the future, so it is still a fantastic dream. In addition, Skelmersdale’s Fairyland and Wallace’s Garden are both places of magic and wonder, and even though Capri is a paradise, it is an earthly paradise. The only supernatural thing about it is the aspect of time and the machines that Hedon sees which are products of the future, but still products of man and not something magical.

Hedon’s reason for leaving is nothing extravagant either. Having deserted his “plans and ambitions … influence and property and a great reputation”, he has left in order to be with the woman he loves (1014). He has left a career with lies and intrigues, stepped away from “wreck and ruin just to save a remnant at least of [his] life” and he has no intention of going back there (1015). Hedon has made the choice which Wallace and Skelmersdale failed to make, and this has happened before the reader enters the story. He has left his responsibilities to the world behind and has devoted himself to personal pleasures, such as his name suggests he should.

He has also been rewarded with the woman he loves who has escaped with him to paradise. He describes her as very beautiful, graceful and desirable and talks specifically of her “white neck and the curls that nestled there, and her white shoulder in the sun”. He is careful to express the difference between her beauty, and beauty “which is terrible, cold and worshipful, like the beauty of a saint” and explains that her beauty is something different, something desirable without stirring fierce passion (1014). This might be to polarise the beauty that can be found in the north, where everything is terrible and cold, and the beauty of the south, which is warm and loving. It might also be in order to separate this woman from the
kind of beauty that Cooper has met in reality. He makes his own comparison to this reality when he says that he has had a wife and daughters but that their faces are not as real to him as that of the woman of his dream (1014). If we compare this woman to the women in Skelmersdale’s and Wallace’s dream worlds, there are many similarities: this woman is sensual and graceful and embodies Hedon’s desires, as the Fairy Queen does to Skelmersdale. She is beautiful as all the women in these stories are, and she also shows a mind of her own like the others do. However, there is an important difference from the women of “The Door” and “Mr Skelmersdale” in that this woman is also Hedon’s moral conscience, urging him to do the right thing and to take his responsibility when confronted with his choices as we shall see further on.

Like Wallace, Hedon is confronted with more than one choice. A man, “soberly clad”, comes from the north bearing a message to him. The man is dressed differently from the rest of the assembled party, making him stand out as both a stranger and someone bringing bad news. Indeed, the first time Hedon notices him, he tries to ignore him, as the man watches him from a table close to him, almost as if sensing that he will not bring good news (1017). This strange man could be compared to the “grave” woman in Wallace’s garden who presents Wallace with his choice, urging him to do the right thing, and who is his door back to reality. The difference between them is that the right thing in Wallace’s case would be to stay in the garden, therefore “the grave woman” holds him back. This “soberly clad man” has a different agenda altogether. He tells Hedon that his successor in the north, Evensham, has started talking of war, making threats to the rest of the world. The north now seeks Hedon’s council and his return to his responsibilities in order to prevent the escalation into war. This would mean having to give up everything he has at Capri, including his woman, so Hedon refuses to do the man’s bidding. Hedon wants to be a private man, to mind his own business and enjoy his paradise. He argues that the north must “settle with [Evensham] themselves” (1018).

This is where the difference mentioned earlier comes in: Hedon’s woman is worried by the news of war and tries to reason with him. She begs him to reconsider and to leave the dreamworld and go back to his responsibilities instead of staying, like the other women wanted their men to do. Hedon, however, will not listen to reason and manages to convince her that there will be no war, even though he knows himself that “I lied to her, and in lying to her I also lied to myself” (1019). He is determined that they must keep their sanctuary on the island and not heed the demands of the north whatever happens. He has made his choice and they try to forget the ill-boding messenger and go back to their blissful life.
Things escalate and as the couple are out walking on the island five war aeroplanes cross the sky above them. Hedon is aware of “the way things must go” as he sees these constructions and his beloved again tries to convince him to go back as she too has sensed how bad things must be (1024). In this way he is given a third choice to go back to his responsibilities or face the consequences of his actions, much the same way that Wallace is given several choices whether or not to stay in the real world. Hedon, however, becomes agitated and again refuses to go back and “talking eloquently … talking to exalt love, to make the life [they] were living seem heroic and glorious”, he stands firm by his decision and convinces her that he must stay (1026-7).

War comes, and the couple must flee their paradise island as the other inhabitants get roused by the spirit of war and join Evesham’s side, drilling, shouting and bawling. There is a similarity here to the stories of Skelmersdale and Wallace, as the choice they make initially affects their social surroundings. “I was no one”, Cooper admits. “All my magnificence had gone from me”, and he is no longer respected by the people of the island. Where he was formerly greeted like royalty he now becomes an outcast like Skelmersdale and the couple are pushed around and shouted at, and the tension rises. So they get a boat to try to escape the war (1029).

Wells carefully describes the couple’s flight from the island and their many attempts to reach a safe place on the mainland. They end up at Paestum on the coast of Italy, a beautiful setting lined with ancient Greek temples. It is in these magnificent surroundings, the ruins of a long-dead civilization, that the couple spends their last hours together before they are both killed (1033). As a last enormous act of symbolism, Wells has his tragic hero carry his dead lover into the temple grounds of the old Greek culture where he himself dies as their Armageddon peaks with the whole world at war.

Cooper is punished for the choices that he makes in the dream as Hedon, just as Skelmersdale and Wallace were punished for making their choices. Where the other two men choose their responsibility, Hedon chooses the dream. There is, as in the other stories, a short-term and a long-term effect of the choice and we start seeing the short-term effect of his choices at the various times when Cooper wakes up from his dream. He is bewildered at waking up because of the reality of the dreams and cannot “believe that all these vivid moments had been no more than the substance of a dream” (1021). Going about his daily business, his mind clings to his dreams and he wonders about the things that have happened in them. Like Skelmersdale and Wallace, he cannot concentrate on his work because he is preoccupied with his dreams. He argues with himself over the matter of the war and his
decision. For a few days, he cannot seem to dream again and he becomes more and more uncertain about whether it was all real or not.

As we get closer to the end of the story, the long-term effect starts to show on Cooper. As with the characters of Skelmersdale and Wallace, this effect can be seen through Cooper himself, and the mental anguish that starts to show on him. As presented earlier, the short-term effect gives some quick insights into Cooper’s life and his struggle to manage his work. We see more and more of the long-term effect on the train, as Cooper’s feelings become more violent. The narrator becomes increasingly concerned as Cooper becomes desperate and slows his storytelling down. The narrator pulls the last bits and pieces of the story from him as Cooper is really too heartbroken to continue. “‘Yes,’ … ‘Yes?’” the narrator insists and Cooper admits that Hedon’s death was not the end of the dreams. Indeed, now his dreams are filled with “great birds that fought and tore” bringing to the reader the image of vultures and ravens, feasting on corpses. It is clear that these birds of prey are nothing that Cooper has only dreamt once, but that continue to haunt his dreams (1038). “The thing’s killing me”, he admits “night after night” (1011).

It was mentioned in the first paragraphs of this analysis that the narrator had little importance for the story, unlike the narrators of the other two stories. However, he is important in one aspect, and that is to bring authenticity to Cooper’s story. As a character, he connects the story to the reader by the book he is reading and his calm and normal appearance (Scuriatti, 3). Like the other narrators, he is initially sceptical of the story and considers it to be nothing more than a dream (1013). Cooper goes to much effort in explaining the topographical details of the island and its surroundings, and the setting of Capri becomes very important as the island exists in real life and the narrator has been there, seen the sights that Cooper tells of, and is amazed that this man can have all this knowledge without ever going there himself. He starts to change his mind as Cooper gives his precise description of Capri without ever having set his foot there. “You have been to Capri, of course?” the narrator asks as Cooper remembers the ruins of Torre Annunziata. “Only in this dream” he answers (1023).

In the end, the narrator seems convinced that this strange man indeed dreams this night after night, as it has obviously taken its toll on him, the way he looks and acts. To Cooper, the dream is something real. Certainly, we never hear from the narrator’s own words if he believes Cooper’s story to be true or not, but as was the case with Wallace, we are definitely encouraged by Wells to think that this is the case. The narrator’s connection to Capri and the many colourful images that Cooper gives of the place should be enough to convince anyone that he has been there in some way. The narrator is convinced in the end that Cooper has had
these dreams and that they have been a great strain on him. However, there is no evidence that Cooper has been transported into this futuristic world.

From a perspective of credibility, Cooper is perceived as an ambiguous character; on the one hand he is well educated and competent, but on the other hand he is also nervous and worn out and he does not seem to be in full control of his senses (1010-1). He has some difficulty in telling the story; he forgets some details but remembers other things perfectly. Cooper himself comments on this and says that: “it is impossible for one man to tell another just these things”. He tries to explain his feelings about the dream world and that love is “emotion, it’s a tint, a light that comes and goes” (1015). In this sense he is more aware than the other two men of the difficulty of trying to convince someone else about his feelings. Indeed, anyone who has ever tried to reconstruct their feelings in a conversation will know the truth of this, and the narrator, observing Cooper’s appearance and behaviour on the train, can tell that this man is deeply troubled.

As with the other stories, it is easy to argue the idea of the compensatory dream in this story too. Cooper works as a solicitor and has a strikingly dull and ordinary life which makes him irritated (1022). He also mentions wife, daughters and family as if either they did not matter or the memory is too painful. This could be an indicator that Hedon’s life is a compensation for Cooper’s life. It has already been said that besides living on a paradise island lacking nothing, Hedon has the company of the love of his life, is treated like royalty and everyone knows and respects him. Surely, this must be the strongest indication yet that the dream is a compensation for a dreary reality. However, Cooper’s dream world turns against him and he is consequently destroyed by it. What message does this send to us?

As in the other stories, the message of this ending is dualistic. Martin Gardner sees in this story the political views of Wells himself: the optimistic utopia that would be created out of socialistic order and harmony, and the pessimistic dystopia of war that follows if this order was not followed and if science was used for material gains (1-5). Not only are these views present, but the very essence of this ending is the polarisation of two images: the image of socialism and individualism, the image of the aesthetic versus the political that was shown earlier or the image of the realistic and the magical, shown in the earlier stories. In this story the loving couple, desiring only pleasure and beauty, are killed by the political machine of war in a landscape taken from any renaissance painting. The dichotomy between two worlds is obvious.

The Wellsian mixing of genres is apparent in this story too, where a science fiction story is intertwined with a realistic story. In the title we are presented with a conflicting idea where
a dream, generally associated with something good, is mixed with Armageddon, a horrible event. The idea of dualism stretches far enough to split even the dream into two different worlds, a positive and a negative one. Authenticity is once again built up to preserve the realism of the story and this story presents most evidence for its authenticity.

It has been shown earlier that the stories of Skelmersdale and Wallace were fables concerned with the message of grasping the dream, of holding on to beauty and pleasure in a dreary world. In this story, this is just what the main character does. He pursues his dreams and he escapes the dull, grey world and its ashes to live a happy life in a paradise world with the woman he loves. He leaves his duties and his responsibilities behind for other men to handle. Even when war threatens the whole world, even when both he and his love are threatened, he will not put aside his personal happiness. The irony is that he loses it all the same and this world of beauty and love becomes a nightmare of carrion birds and death.

Wells shows here that one cannot blindly plummet into beauty and desire without rational thinking. In order to be able to create a better life for ourselves, we must remember that the door goes two ways, and each must be dealt with, one cannot be overlooked. Hard work and perhaps even suffering are required in order to have peace and beauty. Relating this to the politics of Wells, William Hyde well describes this sense of compromise, or balance, in Wells: “In the coming utopia, the creative spirit must replace the spirit of gain, but in any period the extremes of either … are alike impossible” (224).
Conclusion

After reading these three stories, it is clear to us that dreams can quickly turn into nightmares. Even if the dream itself is wonderful, the beauty of it could be enough to make one cast aside real life, turning this into a nightmare instead.

As previously mentioned in the introduction, the different worlds of the three stories are not so different at all. The dreamworlds all contain fantastic settings, love, joy and pleasure, beautiful people and beautiful women who are kind and loving towards the three men who enter these worlds. The worlds offer peace, delight and passionate love, something that the realities of the three characters cannot provide for them. In this analysis, there really has not been enough consideration as to the importance of the women, the loving characters that the men of these stories are infatuated with. The reason for this is merely that there is not enough room to develop the idea of these brief relationships and the importance of them. There is, no doubt, much importance to these characters, but unfortunately they had to be analysed as part of the worlds they are in and some of the effect they have on the men of the stories.

These men are not similar; Skelmersdale is a simple grocer’s assistant, Wallace is a politician and Cooper/Hedon is a solicitor/world leader. Nevertheless, they all still have a similar view of their everyday life, their reality; they consider it toilsome, dreary and dull. The real world comes out as grey and unfulfilling and they would rather follow their desires and stay in the dream world.

However, Skelmersdale and Wallace do not; instead they choose to side with the real world, even though they do it for different reasons, duty and simple stupidity. Unlike them, Cooper/Hedon chooses the dream world, to follow his desires, to leave his responsibilities behind and have other men do the work instead. Regardless of their differences, none of these three men find happiness in their choices. None of them is allowed to rest within reality or dream world. Skelmersdale and Wallace who choose to serve in reality end up in anguish and despair and Hedon who makes his choice to follow a dream of love and beauty suffers a fate even worse.

Throughout these stories, there is a clear focus on authenticity from Wells’s point of view. It has been shown here that the author goes to great lengths to authenticate his characters and their situations and experiences. As stated in the introduction, this analysis argues that there is a connection between this authentication and the message of the author. By presenting these situations as realistic, Wells is demonstrating that these are not isolated events, and they are not merely events of fiction. Everyone has dreams, everyone has fantasies. These stories might not be presented as real events that have actually happened, but in people’s minds,
these things happen every day. We travel in time, we enter our own fairyland, we meet the
beauty of our dreams, and we step through a doorway into our own magical kingdom. Wells
shows by this authentication that these characters are just like anyone of his readers.

The messages of these stories are paradoxical when they are put together: Skelmersdale
and Wallace fail to grasp their dream, they choose their duty and this leads them to misery.
Cooper tries to the horrible end to deny the real world and his responsibilities to it and stay in
his dream where there is beauty and love, but he cannot remain happy and is eventually
destroyed. Is it the dreams that destroy these men’s lives? Does the vision of something
beautiful and unattainable make this existence intolerable? Cooper himself addresses this
issue: “If … this slaughter and stress is life why have we this craving for pleasure and beauty?
If there is no refuge, if there is no place of peace, and if all our dreams of quiet places are a
folly and a snare, why do we have such dreams?” (1029). He has pursued his love and his
good intentions to live in happiness and it has given him death and destruction. This is the
very central dilemma of the three stories: what is the point of dreaming of beautiful things if
life is toilsome, filled with pain, with no happiness to be found anywhere?

Wells is trying to tell us that this is why we dream. We need dreams more than ever when
life is rough and hard and we must struggle for our existence. All the characters of these
stories dream of something more, something beautiful, something they do not have in real life,
even if they appear to have everything. The dreams do not ruin their lives, their lives are
dependent on them, and it is only when they deny these dreams that their lives are ruined.
They make different mistakes, however, and Wells shows in these stories that although there
is no happiness in being completely committed to one’s duties and responsibilities, we cannot
submit ourselves completely to the dream and all its pleasures either. It is not possible to be
happy simply as a materialistic person living in the present or as the aesthetic dreamer not
thinking about one’s responsibilities to others.

Furthermore, in these stories we see the mixing of genres that Wells does best. The stories
are a mixture of fantasy, folk tale, science fiction and real life stories, and they are all
presented with as much validation as possible to ensure the reader that even though these
stories are fictional, there is an element of truth in them. This mixture is done to show that life
is a mixture of fiction and reality, boredom and ecstasy, that there is magic and wonders all
around us and that it is up to us to see them and to decide whether or not to let this magic
influence us and be a part of our lives.
Works Cited

Primary Source

Secondary Sources