



Vegetarianism and  
Veganism in Literature  
from the Ancients to the  
Twenty-First Century

Theophilus Savvas

# Chapter 3: “Vegetarianism and the Utopian Novel”

From Theophilus Savvas' *Vegetarianism and Veganism in Literature from the Ancients to the Twenty-First Century* (2024).

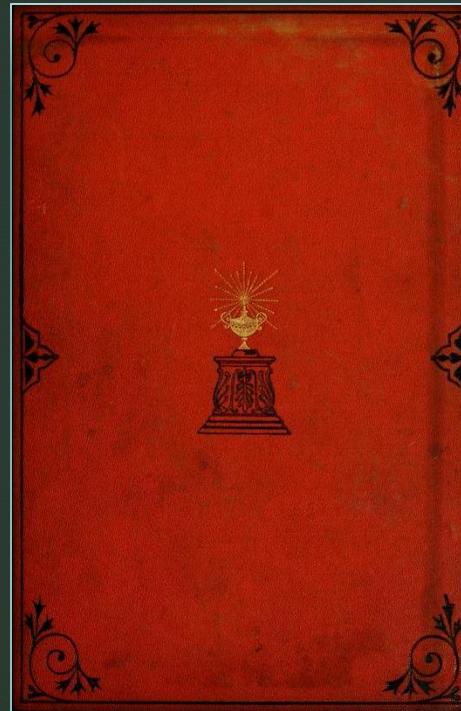


# *Animal-free amuse bouche.*

- “The late Victorian period saw an increase in thinking about what was now codified as ‘vegetarianism.’ Works by Howard Williams, Henry Salt, Edward Carpenter, and the Theosophists Anna Kingsford and Annie Besant, had established vegetarianism in London as a ‘new cult’ in the words of the young Gandhi, who arrived in the capital in 1888” (64).
- “From the perspective of literary history, though, the most significant representations of vegetarianism at this time were in the utopian novel, and a strong association [between the two] developed” (65)
- From here, Savvas will cover works from Edward Bulwer-Lytton, Samuel Butler, H.G. Wells, Edward Bellamy, Elizabeth Burgoyne Corbett, and Charlotte Perkins Gilman.

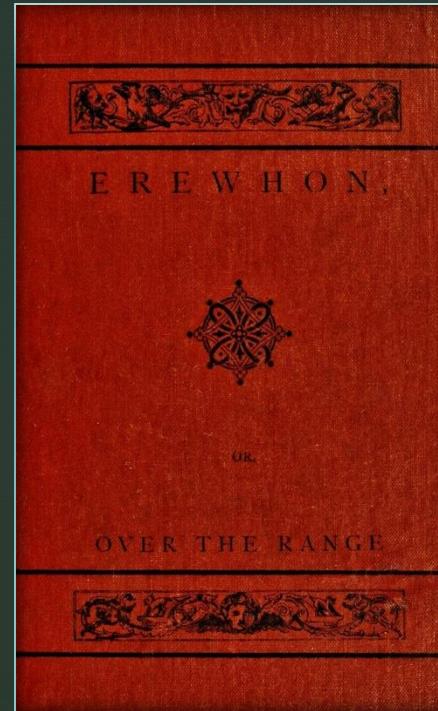
# Edward Bulwer-Lytton's The Coming Race (1871)

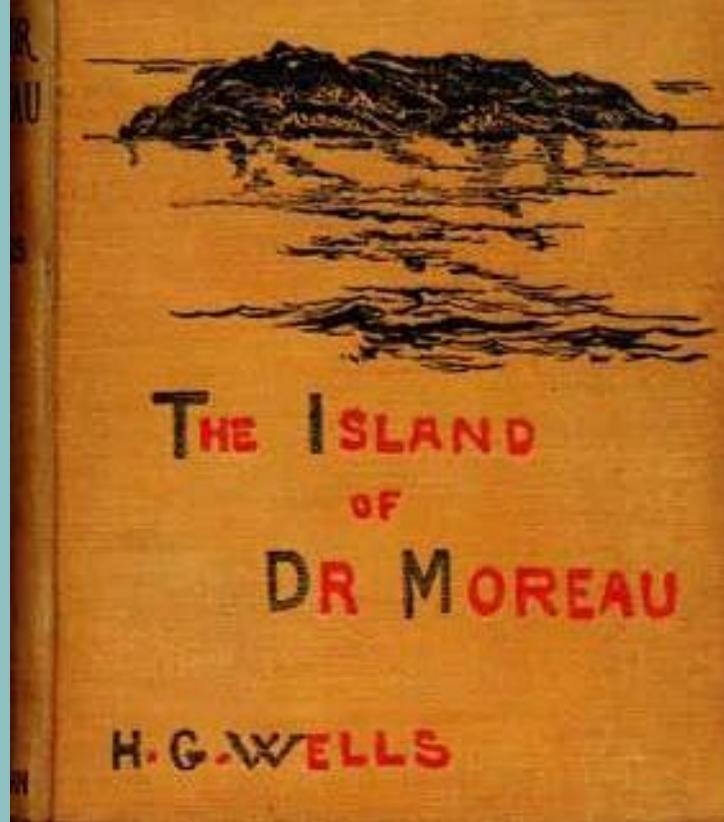
- “A crucial part of civilization for the Vril-ya is vegetarianism... Vril is the means by which this race distinguished itself from its antecedents; but the measure of its distinction, the marker of its moral and physical superiority, is vegetarianism” (66).
- “Since vegetarianism is synonymous with civilization, eating meat is barbaric and the narrator’s physical suitability for doing so renders him ‘obnoxious,’ ‘savage,’ and ‘dangerous’” (67).
- “...Bulwer-Lytton’s novel ultimately offers a self-referential undermining of utopian thinking itself... Vegetarianism works as a synecdoche for utopianism itself: a slippery, double-edged ideal, which the reader is encouraged to feel ambivalent about by novel’s end” (69).



# Samuel Butler's *Erewhon* (1872, 1901)

- “Sue Zemka argues that the hybridity of the original sections of *Erewhon* unsettles the assumptions of ‘a biologically stable identity for the human species,’ as well as destabilizing the presumed boundary between ‘higher and lesser man,’ between English narrator and colonial subject. ‘The Rights of Animals’ section arguably acknowledges the possibility of such a dissolution more completely than the earlier sections as it brings together these themes through the rejection by both Erewhonians and the narrator of vegetarianism. The former repudiate the ‘rights’ of animals because the granting of them threatens the distinctions of humanity, while the latter’s disavowal constitutes a symbolic rejection of all the radical causes with which vegetarianism had come to be associated” (74).





A MODERN UTOPIA  
H.G. WELLS



The  
Time Machine

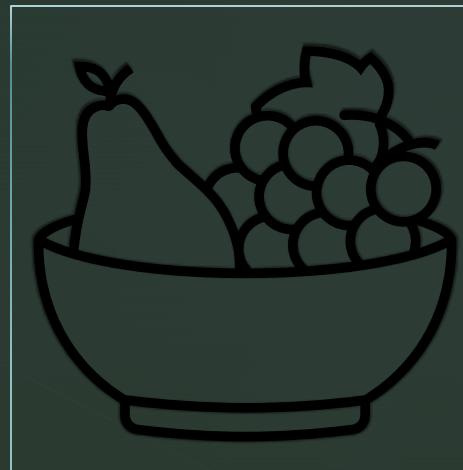
An Invention

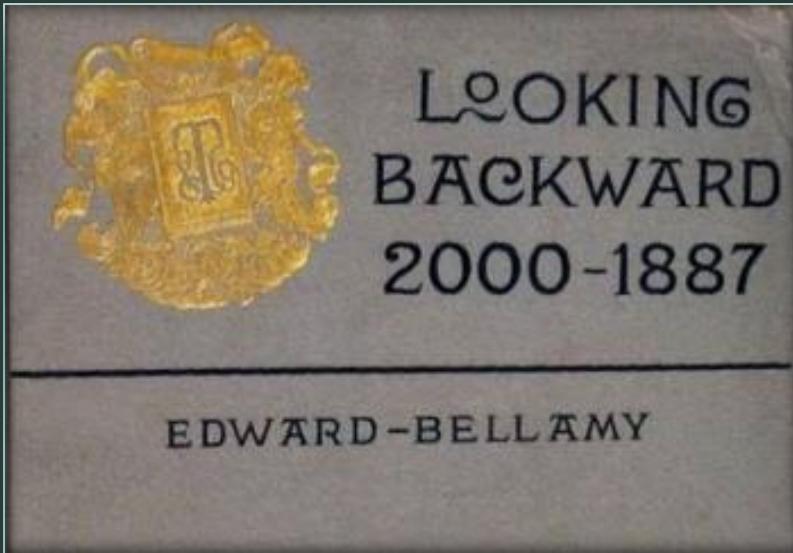
By  
H. G. Wells

HG Wells' Scientific Romances and the Role of  
Vegetarianism in them.

*“In Fleet Street I tried a very cheap vegetarian restaurant once or twice, but it left me hungry in the night.”*

- “Vegetarianism in both *The Time Machine* and *The Island of Dr. Moreau*, then, functions as a problematic line of demarcation between the civilized and the savage, the human and the beast. But it is a demarcation that is ultimately deconstructed in these, essentially, dystopian texts; the combination of this and Wells’ own skeptical views on vegetarianism renders the ending of both texts ambiguous” (80).
- “Kemp is right to suggest that vegetarians in Wells are received with ‘increasing impatience’ but the regularity of the appearance of the topic and the way in which it features in the scientific romances, at least, suggest that vegetarianism might be evolutionary destiny; whether this is a destiny to be resisted—as likely to lead to the ‘species suicide’ that Wells thought mankind tending towards—or embraced, perhaps as moral evolution, he never seems quite sure” (82).





## Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward* (1888) and *Equality* (1897)

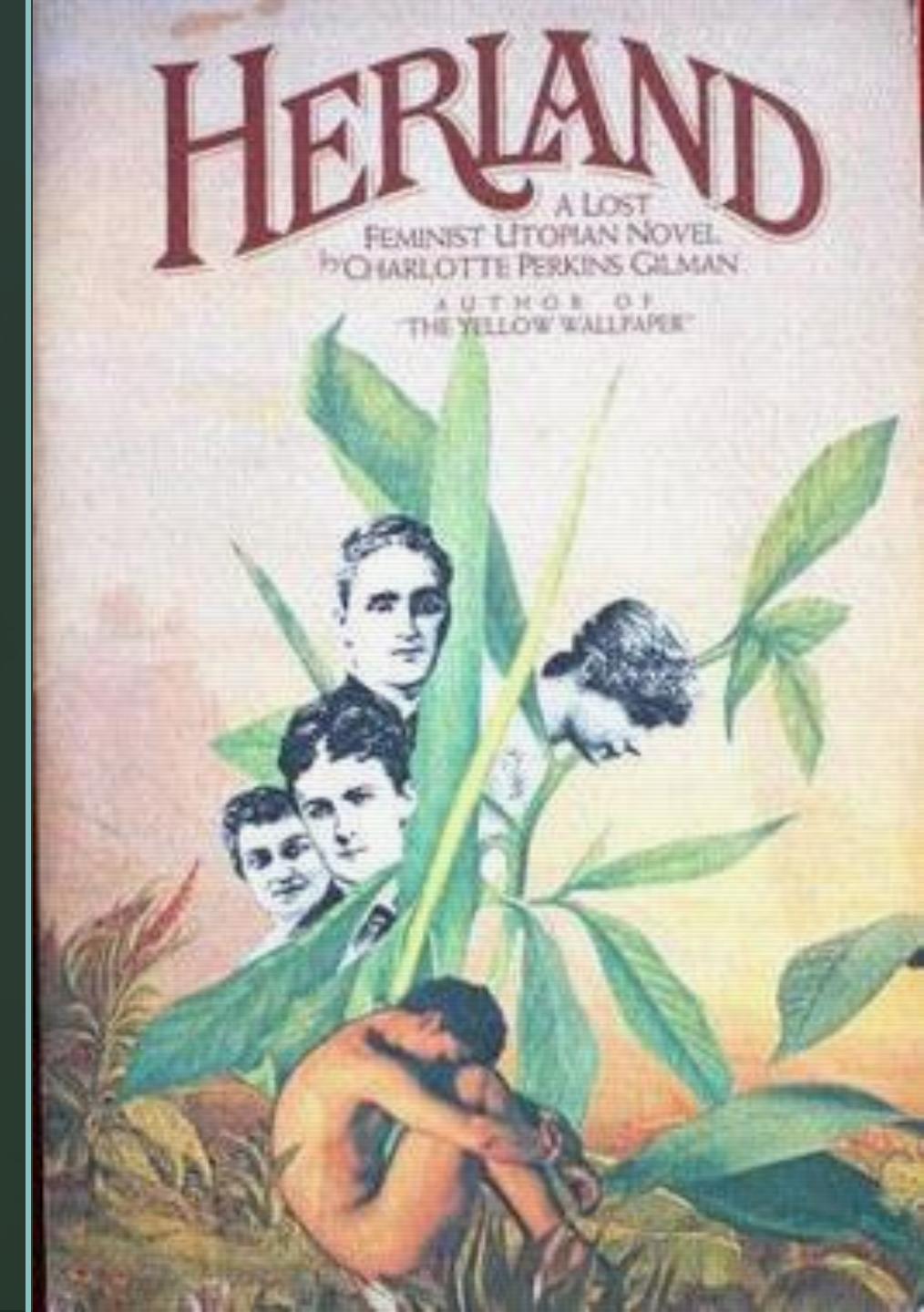
- “*Looking Backward* itself does not include any mention of vegetarianism in the modern society, but in a notable parallel with Butler and the second edition of *Erewhon*, Bellamy felt the urge to include a lengthy disquisition on animal rights and meat-eating in his sequel *Equality* published in 1897” (82).
- “The notion of a collective and apparently global economic system is central to the philosophy of the utopia set out by Bellamy, and it is this which has facilitated vegetarianism” (84).
- “Vegetarianism is then tied specifically to the liberation of women as the ‘revolt against animal food coincided with the complete breakdown of domestic service and the demand of women for a wider life’” (84-85).

# Elizabeth Burgoyne Corbett's New Amazonia (1889)

- “*New Amazonia* thus explicitly links these forms of oppression with patriarchy and many forms of liberation with patriarchy’s demise. In this way, the novel’s vegetarianism can thus be placed in the context of Adams’s argument and meat-eating can be understood as a product of and symbolic bolster to patriarchy” (87).
- “These passages explicitly link both slaughter and flesh-consumption with male-power and control, but the book also tacitly links them with class as the only male in the book, who is also a tourist from Victorian times, having apparently woken in the future in much the same way as the narrator, is a snobbish aristocrat who describes as a ‘confounded nuisance’ the lack of ‘butcher’s meat’” (88).

# Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Herland* (1915)

- “While there is no evidence that Gilman ever became a vegetarian, the sensibility of the poem intimates why the diet of her ideal female state would be meatless” (89).
- “The environmental philosopher Val Plumwood has pointed out that ‘many of the same rules that exclude women are used to exclude non-humans, ensuring that they don’t get their fair share of the earth either, and that the system is anthropocentric in the same way that it is androcentric.’ This is exemplified in *Herland* when the lack of animals in the society causes surprise to the visiting men” (90-91).
- “This incipient veganism is intrinsic to the ordering principle of motherhood; it is thus part of the revised conception of the natural that the novel establishes, and as such requires no specific name, explanation, or justification within the fabric of the society or the novel” (91).



*This PowerPoint was assembled while  
listening to Jean-Paul Dessy's [Voices of the  
Animals](#)*

