



SOCIAL THEMES IN 'THE LOST WORLD' BY ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE

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ABSTRACT

Social and political factors have at all times a critical influence on culture and literature in general. The sociological method is able to explain the relationship of a work with external reality, indicating social life, politics and economy of a period. The sociological method, like all other variants of analysis, puts forward its own principles of generalization. This article demonstrates some examples of the implementation of this very method in the novel 'The Lost World' by Arthur Conan Doyle analyzing it through sociological approach.

Introduction. It is common knowledge that the literature of any given period, on the one hand, is the social, economic and political life of that period. The study of literature through the discipline of sociology, integrates a concern for meaning and the unique properties inherent in literary texts, representing the economics, attitudes, morals and religion of the society that produced the texts. That literature is a reflection of the nation is a fact that has been commonly recognized. Literature indeed reflects the society, its good values and its ills. In its instructive function, literature displays the ills of the society with a view to making the society realize its mistakes and make amends. It also projects the virtues or good values in the society for people to emulate. Literature, as an imitation of human action,

often presents a picture of what people think, say and do in the society.

Literature review. Genette Gordon states that the sociological approach to literature means locating an author and his works in a wide social context [3,108]. So, a work of literature can only be properly understood by examining the society in which it was written. Robert Baker writes, 'A sociological approach to literature entails analyzing how a work of literature reveals structural inequalities that are still relevant today' [2,234]. Roger Wasson considered literature to be the expression of "race, milieu and moment" [6,203]. In his article 'Arthur Conan Doyle: A life in letters' Janet Pascal gives an overview of A.C.Doyle's literary and political activities. He writes that Doyle described most of his real life experiences in his books to draw that time's both social and political life [4, 95].



Kelvin Jones writes that 'The Lost World' by Arthur Conan Doyle gives a chronology of the adventures of four men who travel to South America to discover a new plateau inhabited by dinosaurs and ape-men. Professors at the University of Edinburgh inspired the two professors in the novel: Professor Challenger was based on William Rutherford and Professor Summerlee shared many characteristics with Sir Robert Christison. Edward Malone and Lord John Roxton created the portraits of Edmund Dene Morel and Roger Casement who were the founders of the Congo Reform Association [5, 123].

Analysis. When Doyle wrote *The Lost World*, he was eager to go far from Holmes and create a new type of hero. In professor Challenger, Doyle keeps the intellectual brilliance of Sherlock Holmes, but places it in the type of brash and physical man who could drive the plot of an adventure story. Some argue that Challenger is an alter ego of Doyle. When *The Lost World* first came out, it contained a fake photograph of the story's four adventurers. The professor Challenger in the photograph—with his hairy hands, excessive beard, and bushy eyebrows—is none other than a heavily made-up Arthur Conan Doyle himself, which was the proof for the dilemma mentioned above.

The Lost World explores various themes, including adventure, exploration, evolution, the love and limits of scientific knowledge, imperialism and more. Here some explanation for each of these themes:

Adventure. *The Lost World* is often classified as an adventure story, and indeed, it is the journey of the central heroes into an unknown world that runs the plot and keeps the reader turning over the pages. Plot is so extraordinary that it

drives the story much more than characters. Will the men survive till the end of the journey? Will they be able to learn the plateau in depth? Will they escape from the dinosaurs and ape-men? Will they manage to return home safely? During the journey, the adventurers encounter fabulous, exotic, and unusual landscapes, life forms, and people, bringing the reader inside the adventure. At the novel's end, Malone and Lord Roxton plan a new adventure as well:

'I'll use my own,' said Lord John Roxton, 'in fitting a well-formed expedition and having another look at the dear old plateau' [2,353].

Masculinity. There's no doubt that *The Lost World* is an extremely man-centered novel. Malone is on a journey to show something heroic to win the woman he loves. Lord John Roxton is a brave, courageous adventurer who searches for chances to fight against danger and prove his manliness. Both professor Challenger and professor Summerlee are out to prove the other wrong and feed their egos. Pride, bravery, and violence take dominance on the pages of the novel. The novel certainly does have a few female characters, but their roles tend to be peripheral, and often they exist to do little more than to encourage men to action or, in South America, to be traded as commodities:

'But chances are all around you. It is the mark of the kind of man I mean that he makes his own chances. You can't hold him back. I've never met him, and yet I seem to know him so well. There are heroisms all round us waiting to be done. It's for men to do them, and for women to reserve their love as a reward for such men. Look at that young Frenchman who went up last week in a balloon. It was blowing a gale of wind; but



because he was announced to go he insisted on starting. The wind blew him fifteen hundred miles in twenty-four hours, and he fell in the middle of Russia. That was the kind of man I mean. Think of the woman he loved, and how other women must have envied her! That's what I should like to be,— envied for my man.' [2, 10]

European Superiority. For contemporary readers, some of *The Lost World* can be weird reading in the way that it illustrates non-white and non-European characters. Zambo is the stereotype of the African servant who gets no greater pleasure than serving his white bosses. The frequent mention of 'wild Indians', 'half-breeds' and 'savages' reveal the attitude of the four European adventurers to the darker-skinned people they encounter in South America. On the plateau, the Indians seem a little less than human, and Malone narrates their frequent deaths with scientific detachment. Besides, Doyle draws the picture of scientific life by describing conferences and meetings among researchers:

'If any person in this hall dares to doubt my veracity, I shall be glad to have a few words with him after the lecture.' ("Liar!") *'Who said that?'* (Again the inoffensive one plunging desperately, was elevated high into the air.) *'If I come down among you— —'* (General chorus of 'Come, love, come!' which interrupted the proceedings for some moments, while the chairman, standing up and waving both his arms, seemed to be conducting the music. The Professor, with his face flushed, his nostrils dilated, and his beard bristling, was now in a proper Berserk mood.) *'Every great discoverer has been met with the same incredulity—the sure brand of a generation of fools. When great facts are laid before you, you have not the*

intuition, the imagination which would help you to understand them. You can only throw mud at the men who have risked their lives to open new fields to science. You persecute the prophets! Galileo! Darwin, and I——' (Prolonged cheering and complete interruption.) [2,78]

Evolution. Darwin's theory of evolution had been in circulation for nearly half a century by the time Doyle writes *The Lost World*, and the novel frequently reflects on the concept. In Maple White Land we can see evolution in progress through ape-men who are more than once described as the "missing link" between humans and apes. All of the living things in the lost world have evolved to play a crucial role in a balanced ecosystem. Doyle also has a little fun questioning the limits of evolution, for despite his intelligence, professor Challenger often acts in animalistic ways and does not seem to have evolved much beyond the ape-men:

'The same short, broad figure, the same heavy shoulders, the same forward hang of the arms, the same bristling beard merging itself in the hairy chest. Only above the eyebrows, where the sloping forehead and low, curved skull of the ape-man were in sharp contrast to the broad brow and magnificent cranium of the European, could one see any marked difference. At every other point the king was an absurd parody of the Professor'[2, 265].

Imperialism. *The Lost World* enacts on a small scale the imperialistic attitudes that built the British Empire. The top of the plateau had, of course, been populated by two groups of people—the ape-men and the Indians—for millennia, but our European protagonists view it is a savage place for them to control and name. For much of the novel, the lost world is called



"Maple White Land," named after the first European explorer to discover it. By the end of the novel, Malone claims they now call it "our land." Other peoples and cultures seem to exist for the primary purpose of European study, exploitation, and conquest:

'Lake Gladys—my own lake—lay like a sheet of quicksilver before me, with a reflected moon shining brightly in the center of it. With much labor we got our things up the steps, and then, looking back, took one last long survey of that strange land, soon I fear to be vulgarized, the prey of hunter and prospector, but to each of us a dreamland of glamour and romance, a land where we had dared much, suffered much, and learned much—OUR land, as we shall ever fondly call it'[2, 224].

Doyle reiterates his some points on wars among nations. It can be said that he could predict World Wars in advance and called the nations not to fight against each other as it is meaningless:

'We have been privileged,' he cried, strutting about like a gamecock, 'to be present at one of the typical decisive battles of history—the battles which have determined the fate of the world. What, my friends, is the conquest of one nation by another? It is meaningless. Each produces the same result. But those fierce fights, when in the dawn of the ages the cave-dwellers held their own against the

tiger folk, or the elephants first found that they had a master, those were the real conquests—the victories that count. By this strange turn of fate we have seen and helped to decide even such a contest. Now upon this plateau the future must ever be for man.' [2, 294]

Conclusion. In conclusion, *The Lost World* comprises several social themes through adventures of the main characters. It can only be understood when the novel is learnt in a wider social context being analyzed with sociological method and explained by sociological approach. On the one hand, the writer seems to entertain his readers with unexpected flows of the plot throwing the adventurers into harsh conditions, making them to face with fear and death, and encouraging to move forward to accomplish their mission. On the other hand, attentive readers can comprehend what the writer would like to demonstrate and tell them about that period. Investigating social clues in the novel can give an opportunity to study the society of that era in depth and draw a more accurate conclusion in history. As we mentioned above, sociological method assists to analyze the book more clearly and accurate studying the text and the society at the same time and at the same level.

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