

Words that (should not!) exclude: Scientific explanations in science fiction and in Villiers de l'Isle-Adam's *Eve future*

Matthias Hausmann (Julius-Maximilians-Universität Würzburg)

Science fiction usually introduces unheard inventions which (might) influence the fictional world in a tremendous way. Due to the genre's claim to present a plausible alternate reality a major task for any author of science fiction is to provide explanations of these inventions that suspend the reader's disbelief. A well-known example is H.G. Wells' description of his time machine – maybe one of the most intriguing inventions in literature that fulfils a dream of mankind and finds a succinct and credible explanation in the novel. Almost at the same time French symbolist Auguste de Villiers de l'Isle-Adam presents in his *Eve future* a comparable dream of mankind: the mechanical creation of a perfect being. Nevertheless, his narrative strategy could not be further away from Wells': the endless technical details with which his fictive Edison explains the android exclude the listening Lord Ewald, for whom the robot is created, and the reader alike. These extremely complicated explanations surely have a comic effect, so often associated with a creative use of words, but Villiers' utilization of scientific language goes way beyond this seemingly playful effect and has goals that are far from being innocent. Our contribution aims to highlight these goals and, by analysing its scientific wordplay, specify the place of this French novel in the history of science fiction.