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The Future of Society:
Dystopian and Utopian Aspects in H.G. Wells'
The Time Machine and *Men Like Gods*

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Abstract

My essay will discuss the subject of dystopia and utopia in two selected works by H.G. Wells. I will show that both novels reflect the changing discourse of the time in which they were written, and will argue that the author changes large parts of his philosophy and his way of writing after World War One. Further, this essay will show that both novels contain dystopian and utopian elements, but that one element is more prominent in each of the novels. Finally, this essay will show how H.G. Wells presented his ideas of liberal socialism and how those ideas manifested in his post-war novel. The first chapter will discuss the pre-war novel and the society that influenced the writing of *The Time Machine*. The second chapter will focus on the change of perspective after World War One and the creation of Wells' utopia in *Men Like Gods*. The third chapter will address the political views of H.G. Wells by looking at ideas that the author presented at the time and by discussing some of the critique he received by his contemporaries.

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Introduction

“Nature never appeals to intelligence until habit and instincts are useless. There is no intelligence where there is no need of change.” H.G. Wells.

The year is 1895; Herbert George Wells is a 29-year-old author who has just published his first novel *The Time Machine*. It depicts a man of the new century, a man of science and rationality, as he travels through time and discovers the future of our race in the year 802, 701 AD. The novel explores the futuristic ideas of a man raised in a society that is subject to great social and political change. The unstoppable force of the industrial revolution, the endless new discoveries of the scientific field and the wealth and stability created by the British Empire cause a radical change of discourse in England at this time.

H.G. Wells was at this time an educated man, a biologist, a firm believer in Darwinian Theory and an outspoken socialist. Throughout his career he would describe himself as a “journalist” portraying the world around him as he saw it, with subjective comments on the nature of his fellow man and on the state of society and Western culture. He is today a giant of literature, the father of science fiction and the first to write about the cutting-edge science in his novels, subjects like the fourth dimension, the atomic bomb and genetic mutation were all key elements of his futuristic writing.

This essay will explore the dystopian and utopian writings of H.G Wells, focusing on *The Time Machine* (1895) and *Men Like Gods* (1923). My research will focus on showing the world of H.G. Wells by analysing the two novels and see how they reflect the social discourse of the time in which the author wrote them. Further, I will argue that there is a change in the mindset of the author from the pre-war novel of 1895 to the novel written after the Great War.

This essay will also argue that both novels contain dystopian and utopian elements, but that in the pre-war novel Wells does not provide a solution to the problems described. That changes in *Men Like Gods* when Wells describes a society and culture that he wants the world to strive for, a system that would cause mankind to evolve into a single unified society devoid of class, injustice, disease and wars through technological and educational progress.

The Time Machine follows an enlightened man at the turn of the century as he travels through time to discover the future of his civilization. The novel is a combined adventure-story and critique of society, a way for H.G. Wells to comment on the problems he sees in Victorian England and a call for those around him to accept a new future based on practicality, pragmatism and scientific truth instead of the medieval dogmas and norms that plague Wells' world.

Whereas *The Time Machine* is the author's critique of society, it does not provide any solution to the problems described in the novel, but only offers hints about how man should approach reality and cast off the old world's way of doing things. In *Men Like Gods*, Wells attempts to offer the solution to the problems he has experienced during his lifetime, and especially after witnessing the horrors of World War One. In *Men Like Gods*, a reporter is transported to a future where there is no centralized government, where education and democratic freedoms combine with a realized anarchy to form, according to the author, the ideal society called utopia.

Chapter one will begin by explaining the notion of dystopian literature. Further, chapter one will also show Wells' critique towards the Victorian society, with focus on religion and social

injustice. Finally, this chapter will discuss the elements of utopia and especially dystopia in *The Time Machine*, focusing on the fear and anxiety that Wells displays throughout the novel.

Chapter Two will discuss the concept of utopian literature and the author's choice of using it to explain his vision of the future. Further, chapter two will discuss the author during and after World War One, his thoughts and beliefs through some of the writing and commentary he made during the war in 1914 to 1918. This chapter will also analyze Wells' political theory in *Men Like Gods*, showing how Wells reacts to the war and the chaos it left behind, suggesting a solution in the novel that might create a more equal and more just society based on education and technology.

Chapter three will focus on the political nature of H.G. Wells. It will show Wells' rejection of the current political systems of his time, and will also discuss his political thoughts and works through the eyes of his critics, the contemporary authors George Orwell and Aldous Huxley.

This essay will be based on a method of comparative literary analysis built upon two primary sources, using historical and cultural secondary sources to support arguments. The purpose of this essay is that you as a reader will receive a greater understanding of the early parts and beginnings of our modern world by exploring the life-changing events and the discourse of that time through the writings of a very outspoken and prolific writer during the late parts of the 19th century and the early parts of the 20th century. I have chosen to perceive these changes through the literature of a man who was very much ahead of his time, a man who expresses a critical view on social injustice, war, class and religion. These are also the views of a politically radical socialist who believed that a totally new system was needed for mankind to take the next step in our common evolution.

Chapter One: The Need For Change

Two elements of this essay that need further explanation are the ideas of dystopia and utopia.

Whilst chapter two will deal with utopia, chapter one will focus on the notion of dystopia.

These literary aspects are ways in which to express the universe of, usually, speculative fiction. In the novels Wells portrays both sides of such a universe; for instance, in *The Time Machine* Wells starts to describe the surroundings and the people as an image of a perfect Eden without struggles or discontent. This suddenly switches to an image where the human race has fallen and been divided into an unequal society of the rich and the poor.

Dystopian literature paints a very bleak and negative picture of a contemporary or future society; it describes an anti-utopia with at least one fatal flaw which has led to a situation where the majority suffer greatly and a select few have all essential control. However, one should not confuse dystopian literature with post-apocalyptic writing; whereas such literature contains many dystopian elements, it mainly focuses on the horrors of war and the eventual demise of the human race due to use of weapons of mass destruction. Dystopian novels are concerned with the flaws of human society and how our division within leads to injustice and an unfair treatment towards those who cannot defend or protect themselves (reference.com: 2012).

During his lifetime, H.G Wells wrote both dystopian and utopian novels, but at the beginning of his career he focused more on the dystopian aspect as he tried to point out what he considered to be the flaws and dangers in his contemporary society and how this would affect the coming generations. Wells novel *The Time Machine* focuses on social injustice and the ongoing fight between science and religion; to understand his writing one must look at the

world that Wells lived in, and also understand the issues that divided his society during the late 19th century and the years before World War One.

Victorian England is described as a starting point of Western society, a place where one could see the beginnings of our modern democratic structure and beliefs take shape. However, Henry (2003: 133-151) describes the reality of 19th century England as chaotic; it was a turbulent time with conservative elements trying desperately to hold back the revolutionary progress that took place in every aspect of people's lives and affected everyone's reality, either positively or negatively. The political ideas spread through writers such as Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels and John Stuart Mills aimed at shaping the future of England and the West. Their ideas advocated the spread of power throughout society and the dislocation of the centralized class hierarchy, which according to them, caused division and lack of progress. But their work did not shape the debate or the discourse as much as the author who became a central inspiration to H.G. Wells and whose theories are described by contemporaries as: "an intellectual revolution such as the world had not known since Luther nailed his thesis to the door of All Saints Church at Wittenberg" (Henry, 2003: 146).

The author described (in the quote) is Charles Darwin, a scientist who had a profound effect on all of Wells' writing, not surprising considering that he studied under Thomas Henry Huxley, referred to by many as "Darwin's Bulldog." Huxley was an influential teacher of Wells' during his time at The Normal School of Science in London, where he studied biology, a subject that would help him create a truthful rendering of all the worlds in his novels. Wells' writing is, of course, very much influenced by his training and by a mind that did not accept the dogmas and norms of the 19th century. I find his writing modern and focused in a time

when uncertainty was something that affected everyone at the height of the industrial revolution.

Greenblatt (2011, Vol E, 9th ed: 1018) describes the Victorian society as searching for something that would ground them and give them a security which they lacked, as the world changed almost from day to day and old truths could no longer be relied upon to anchor society and give everyone a sense of belonging. Religion was one of those areas that were under attack and the critics of *The Time Machine* noticed the lack of Wells' faith. In a review of *The Time Machine* in *The Spectator*, 13 July 1895, R.H. Hutton comments on the way in which Wells describes evolution and on his lack of belief in Christianity:

Mr H.G. Wells has written a very clever story as to the condition of this planet in the year 802,701 AD, though the two letters AD appear to have lost their meaning in that distant date, as indeed they have lost their meaning for not a few even in the comparatively early date at which we all live. (101)

Mitchell (2009: 250) comments on faith and doubt in Victorian England and says that at the middle of the 19th century, England as a nation experienced a crisis of faith. Since most people were religious and 60 percent of the English population were regular churchgoers their beliefs were put to question by geological and archaeological evidence available during this time, and in 1859 when Charles Darwin published *On the Origin of Species*, the idea of nature being in a state of continuous change meant that the world could not be considered static or eternal, a thought that the younger generation took to heart whilst the older kept their beliefs and became more zealous in the defence of those ideas.

In *The Time Machine* Wells shows the reader a world which has clearly changed and no longer exists in a static universe; the human race has developed into two different species, where one is a predator and one is prey. Wells creates a world where God's purpose cannot be said to be understood by man; he puts us in no special category or role, but we are simply just a part of nature, subject to its whims as any other being that inhabits the earth. There is a sense of punishment and retribution from nature that has taken over the landscape and controls all that humans once reigned over. There is an eerie silence that represents the nature of that world, which The Time Traveller at first finds calming, but which later turns into a malice or shadow.

The development of man and the changes that gradually take place in society are a cornerstone in Wells' writing and the novel shows what he believes will be a horrible future if people do not accept the change and reform that he finds necessary. Wells' picture of the development of the human race is quite horrific and very vivid in the novel. He puts turn-of-the-century England into a direct future as seen from his point of view; in other words, he draws an almost straight line from England 1895 to England 802,701 in his attempt to show that if the present policy and thought do not subject themselves to change and reform, this is the future that will come to be.

Religion is only one part of *The Time Machine* that shows how Wells is breaking off from the dogmas of the 19th century; a much heavier emphasis is placed on social inequality, which Wells proclaims will lead to an escalating division between rich and poor which, in his book, reaches a culmination when the social classes develop into two different species, the Morlock and the Eloi. The Morlocks are Wells' idea of the subjugated working-class, who after

millennia have developed into creatures that prey on the weaker Eloi, who in turn represent the aristocracy, who have turned into passive and unintelligent beings.

Mitchell (2009, 17-25) explains that there were essentially only two social classes at the time when Wells wrote *The Time Machine*: aristocrats and commoners, however, social practises and the growing middle classes created a system with workers doing manual labour, the middle class providing services or trade, and landed gentry or aristocrats mainly being land owners, who lived of investments. Wells expands on this in his novel when the protagonist develops his theory on how the two races came to be, concluding that extreme polarization between the working class and the aristocracy has pushed the poor underground where they have been slaves to the wealthy, but as the centuries have passed the tables have turned and the surface dwellers have turned weak and passive, causing them to become prey to the ones living below ground:

Again, the exclusive tendency of richer people – due, no doubt, to the increasing refinement of their education, and the widening gulf between them and the rude violence of the poor – is already leading to the closing, in their interest, of considerable portions of the surface of the land. (50)

In *The Time Machine* Wells displays a negative utopia, a place that on the surface is beautiful but contains deep scars of history and a population that is in a state of conflict. This is a very clear parallel to the author's reality; he paints social injustice with heavy dystopian elements. Wells comments on the working conditions for common labourers in his novel when the protagonist first realises this divide between the two races and again starts formulating a hypothesis on how this came to be:

Evidently, I thought, this tendency had increased till industry had gradually lost its birthright in the sky. I mean that it had gone deeper and deeper into larger and ever larger underground factories, spending a still-increasing amount of time therein, till, in the end! Even now does not an East-end worker live in such artificial conditions as practically to be cut off from the natural surface of the earth? (50)

However, *The Time Machine* does not contain a one-sided critique against the effects of capitalism on its workforce; it also calls into question the idea of socialism, or communism, which was considered by many intellectuals during the 19th century to be the perfect solution to a system that exploited the workforce and would eventually eradicate the class-system. When the protagonist in the novel reflects upon the lifestyle of the Eloi, he finds them both lazy and unintelligent and is disappointed when they do not live up to the expectations he had assumed:

For a moment I was staggered, though the import of his gesture was plain enough. The question had come into my mind abruptly: were these creatures fools? You may hardly understand how it took me. You see I had always anticipated that the people of the year Eight Hundred and Two Thousand odd would be incredibly in front of us in knowledge, art, everything. Then one of them suddenly asked me a question that showed him to be on the intellectual level of one of our five-year-old children – asked me, in fact, if I had come from the sun in a thunderstorm! (24)

The protagonist theorises that the reason for the lack of intelligence in the future Eloi is because of their static lifestyle and total inability to remain curious for a longer period of

time: “A queer thing I soon discovered about my little hosts, and that was their lack of interest. They would come to me with eager cries of astonishment, like children, but like children they would soon stop examining me and wander away after some other toy”(27).

In my opinion, Wells saw the communistic movement and its extremely centralized system as a threat towards discovery and curiosity. Just as he regarded religious dogmas to be conservative and restrictive, he also realised that in such a system there can never be progress since its structure is based on things being static and unchanged. It is important to note, that if there is something that H.G. Wells was promoting it was the constant recreation of society and the belief that nothing is constant, and all things are subject to change.

However, in his later post-war novel, his utopia shares many Marxist ideas. Wells’ utopia in *Men Like Gods* is a classless society where all people are considered to be equals. And whilst Wells is critiquing communism in *The Time Machine* for being static, he lingers on the fact that England is experiencing class-warfare, which is also one of the dystopian elements in *The Time Machine*. Wells’ protagonist is described as the perfect compromise between poor and rich; he represents the station that Wells finds most productive for society, neither part of the underachieving working-class or the lazy upper-class gentry.

The protagonist in the book, described as ‘the Time Traveller’, is the essential embodiment of the turn-of-the-century white man. He is an inventor, a scientist and a modern man in all aspects. He is a stereotypical white male figure of Victorian England: middle-class, supremely intelligent, aloof and confident. He is definitely a carrier of the white man’s burden, and finds it his duty to at least try to civilize the barbaric people of the future and cannot come to grips with why they seem to ignore his presence; his constant focus is on himself and the word egocentric does not come close to cover the extent of his character. The protagonist is,

however, the one who displays most of the utopian elements in the story. Whereas the surroundings have biblical parallels and are in many parts beautiful, it is a false surface that only serves to hide or hint at the apocalyptic nature of the story. The protagonist, on the other hand, is in my opinion, the author's way of showing how the essential modern man should be; he is the sort of person that one can trust not to be part of the conservative crowd that would turn into either a Morlock or an Eloi, but someone who is in control of his own fate. He is curious and empathetic when dealing with the Eloi and he analyzes his situation in a scientific way; he is also, for the most part, happy with his discoveries and his adventures. He is the balance between the good and bad elements of the novel; he is also the one who recognises the dystopia behind the seemingly perfect surface.

The dystopian elements can easily be found throughout the novel. The reader (just as the protagonist) is first lured into a false sense of security when, at first glance, London in 802,701 resembles the biblical Eden: "My general impression of the world I saw over their heads was of a long-neglected and yet weedless garden" (25). Peace seems to reign supreme; innocence and non-violence are the norms that face the Time Traveller as he steps into the world of the Eloi. In fact, everything seems to be uncomplicated and not at all as our protagonist imagined such a future society would be, but as he continues to explore, more and more disturbing evidence shows that this society is not as peaceful as he first thought. He finds remnants of previous civilizations scattered throughout the landscape and is troubled by the ruins he sees: "As I walked I was watchful for every impression that could possibly help to explain the condition of ruinous splendour in which I found the world – for ruinous it was" (28). This sense of unease continues as the novel progresses and reaches a climax as the Time Traveller comes face to face with the Morlocks, who represent all the evil and violent nature

of human behaviour, so much in fact that they have gone backwards in evolutionary terms and resemble more a flock of wild animals, preying on their fellow human beings:

Necessarily my memory is vague. Great shapes like big machines rose out of the dimness, and cast grotesque black shadows, in which dim spectral Morlocks sheltered from the glare. The place, by the by, was very stuffy and oppressive, and the faint halitus of freshly shed blood was in the air (56).

These images described in *The Time Machine* present, symbolically, the fears that Wells and many others share during the late 19th century. The Time Traveller's journey into the underworld shows him that the system has been turned on its head, and now the workers are preying upon and exploiting the rich. The fear of a revolution or violent uprising from the workforce is a constant threat during the late 19th century and early 20th century. Wells addresses this issue and shows that the workers living under the shadows of the big machines will one day no longer accept their oppressed situation. Class-warfare is to Wells a problem that should be discussed and not be considered taboo since it will eventually reach a boiling point.

This chapter has shown that H.G. Wells wanted in *The Time Machine* to give the reader an insight into the problems of Victorian England. He highlights the dangers that his society would encounter if it continues to hold onto the past and not accept that constant change is inevitable, since if we are not flexible, change will be caused by violence instead of reform. I have focused on his views on religion and social injustice since these features heavily in his novel. I have also shown the dystopian qualities of *The Time Machine* with examples from the book. Chapter two will show a new side of Wells, who in the post-war novel creates his own

philosophy and presents his idea on how the future of mankind's development should look like. Chapter two will discuss Wells' utopian literature instead of his dystopian, and also show how he changed as an author after World War One.

Chapter Two: The Great Revolution

As chapter one described the basic features of dystopian literature, chapter two will focus on the utopian literature by looking at H.G. Wells' novel *Men Like Gods* and draw parallels to the dystopian elements in *The Time Machine*. This chapter will also provide the background for Wells' experience during the time of World War One and how that affected his writing and political ideas. H.G. Wells was a very outspoken person who was often quoted or asked to share his opinion on current situations in newspapers or interviews. His vision on how the modern world would develop or react was often true to fact and before the Great War, he was considered by many as a modern prophet who saw what others could not.

Utopian literature is the description of the ideal society; the basis for such a society is the prosperity and security for the inhabitants of the world that the author has created. This type of literature is used as a tool to test and perceive difficult social reform. It is useful, because the author does not have to describe the way in which such reforms were implemented; they only focus on a system that is created to their own ideals and their own needs and do not take into account the political realities of the time nor the opinion of others. (reference.com, 2012).

During World War One, H.G. Wells did not actively engage in the fighting, but was an outspoken critic of war and considered himself as an "extreme pacifist" (*War and the Future*, 1917: 4). But this pacifism was combined with a direct hatred towards the German Imperialists, whom Wells considered to be the sole perpetrators and enemies of mankind. In

1914, Wells writes an article called: “Why Britain Went to War”, where he supports the actions of the British government, whilst displaying a blinding national pride and claims that “This Prussian Imperialism has been for forty years an intolerable nuisance in the earth”(“Why Britain Went to War”, 1914: 1). This claim can be considered quite ironic since at the time of his publication Wells is a part of a nation whose empire covers almost 1/4 of the Earth’s surface and has been the dominant force of Imperialism since the start of the 19th century. The article continues along those lines, but in it Wells also expresses a hope that he shares with many of his contemporaries. The hope is that this war, due to its immensity and countless deaths, will be the end of all wars, and eventually lead mankind into an era of governing through knowledge and education instead of by force or right of birth: “This is already the vastest war in history. It is war not of nations, but of mankind. It is a war to exorcise a world-madness and end an age... This, the greatest of all wars, is not just another war—it is the last war!” (“Why Britain Went to War”, 1914: 2)

However, this viewpoint of absolute right and wrong would change as time progressed and Wells stepped closer into the chaos and reality of war. In 1917 he travelled to Italy and the Western front, and in both places he saw the true reality of war. In previous novels, such as *The War of the Worlds*, Wells contemplates war and chaos on a grand and epic scale, but coming into contact with the victims and combatants of World War One confirmed and strengthened his thoughts that war is the ultimate show of madness and waste: “They look up as the privileged tourist of the front, in the big automobile or the reserved compartment, with his officer or so in charge, passes—importantly. One meets a pair of eyes that seems to say: Perhaps *you* understand” (*War and the Future*, 1917: 4).

After these experiences he no longer focuses on the Scientific Romances, his greatest success as a writer during the turn of the century. Instead, political commitment takes the front seat and the socialist agenda is the focus in the years after the war.

It is during this time that Wells conceptualizes a world that does not contain the waste, fruitlessness and horror that were so constantly a part of the surroundings and psyche of the people that Wells encountered during the years of World War One. He envisions a system based on universal ideas that required no government support or commercial interests. All creation would be to benefit society and the core of this new society would be the education of all people to avoid the terrible mistakes made by previous generations. Wells is very critical to the way hereditary and privileged positions gave some people an advantage over others and seemingly Wells above all else wished that positions in society should be granted through displays of intelligence and training (Spartacus Educational, 2012). This is a theme that would be the focus of his 1924 novel *Men Like Gods*. It spawned a massive amount of discussion and controversy during and after his lifetime, even to such a degree that the world-view depicted in the novel would be forever labelled as “Wellsian-Utopia.”

The novel *Men Like Gods* follows the protagonist Mr Barnstaple as he, together with a few other unfortunate travellers, is accidentally transferred to a parallel universe called Utopia. The similarities with *The Time Machine* are quite obvious; Wells once again sets his protagonist in an alternate universe to escape the rules of his own reality. Just as the Time Traveller, Mr Barnstaple is a modern man with few illusions and a critical perspective on his contemporary society. Mr Barnstaple, just like the Time Traveller, is disappointed with the narrow-minded people in his own time and searches for an ideal to follow “...he wanted to get away for a time from Mr. Peeve. The very streets were becoming a torment to him; he

wanted never to see a newspaper or a newspaper placard again” (2). Throughout the novel Mr Barnstaple becomes educated in the way of life of utopia and in the community’s history, which shares a lot of similarities with Earth’s history. He learns that Utopia is a realized anarchy with no government, religion or monetary system and is based on the five principles of liberty: “privacy, free movement, unlimited knowledge, truthfulness and free discussion and criticism” (182-184).

Mr Barnstaple’s journey to Utopia is characterized by his constant learning; whereas The Time Traveller in *The Time Machine* has a superior knowledge compared to the people he encounters, Mr Barnstaple reacts as a student who wants to learn from people who have infinitely more knowledge than he has. All interaction is mainly positive both with his surroundings and with the people of Utopia. His way of perceiving his own world changes because of his new experiences in this more perfect world: “He was extraordinarily happy with the bright unclouded happiness of a perfect dream. Never before had he enjoyed the delights of an explorer in new lands...” (25).

Just as in *The Time Machine* Wells comments on what he finds to be the greatest flaws in his own society, but in this novel he presents a world that is based on his philosophical ideas and how they manifest themselves in the world of Utopia. The best way to achieve the goals of this new society is clearly stated by the Utopians:

Utopia has no parliament, no politics, no private wealth, no business competition, no police nor prisons, no lunatics, no defectives nor cripples, and it has none of these things because it has schools and teachers who are all that schools and teachers can be.

Politics, trade and competition are the methods of adjustment of a crude society...Our education is our government. (55)

Here the goals of Wells' world-state and the ideals of Utopia are described by the inhabitants of that world. Wells also states what he believes to be the fundamental flaw in his own system; the lack of a good quality education for all. Education and its goal of forming a better future seem to be Wells' obsession. Mitchell (2009: 176-179) describes the Victorian school system as divided, and that school was foremost a place where men were taught how to be respected adults. Although many of the Victorian ideals had disappeared by the nineteen twenties, equality and equal opportunity were not a reality then or even today. I think that during his lifetime, Wells experienced a system that discriminated people based on economy, sex and station. Wells, who has had the benefit of a good education, has very likely come into contact with people who in his eyes are ignorant because of their lack of education or understanding in how things work or how others perceive the world. Wells' principles of liberty for Utopia reflect his desire for a better future for the coming generations; unlimited knowledge and free discussion and criticism are signs of positive ways of thinking from the author and show a very different side compared to the stern critical writing in his turn-of-the-century novel.

Wells' early work had negative overtones that pointed fingers towards those who did not embrace the future. In *The Time Machine* the human race had deteriorated and gone backwards instead of forward; the only hope here lies in total change in all aspects of our current system. Whilst the early novel expresses no hope for the future, it is immediately evident that there is a change in the author when one compares the writing from 1923 to the

novel from 1895. In *Men Like Gods* Wells expresses hope for future societies and his belief that mankind can overcome tragedies such as war or starvation:

There was no knowledge in this Utopia of which Earth had not the germs, there was no power used here that Earthlings might not use. Here, but for the ignorance and darkness and the spites and malice they permit, was Earth to-day...We could do it (206-207).

The utopia in Wells' novel is not something that was created for them by a supernatural being or by stroke of luck. The real Utopia is based on the people in that world, just as the title suggests; these people are the masters of their own fate and control all aspects of their world. They have achieved god-like status and can concentrate on achieving perfection. Perhaps this is a truly comforting thought for someone who has seen much of the chaos and destruction that happened during the early twentieth century and for a man who see that such control is very enviable. Wells describes (in the book) how the utopians, after many catastrophes and several wars, lifted themselves to new heights of human development:

Many thousands of people were lifted out of the normal squalor of human life to positions in which they could, if they chose, think and act with unprecedented freedom. A few, a sufficient few, did. A vigorous development of scientific inquiry began and, trailing after it a multitude of ingenious inventions, produced a great enlargement of practical human power (46).

Such development carried the utopians in Wells' novel to achieve perfection in the mind of the author, but the novel also shows how far the people in Wells' own world are from such

salvation. The dystopian qualities in *Men Like Gods* and *The Time Machine* show that the people of that world, and our own, are in need of salvation. However, The Time Traveller is not the saviour of either that world or our own. He follows his own agenda and does not strive to improve; his goal is knowledge. Mr Barnstaple, on the other hand, finds it his duty and quest to improve our world and bring the knowledge he has learnt to those who can benefit from it, in his own time. Wells portrays his protagonist as a Messiah who will spread a new form of religion; one based on education, change and communal gain instead of the individualism shown by The Time Traveller: "...he belonged now soul and body to the Revolution, to the Great Revolution that is afoot on Earth; that marches and will never desist nor rest again until old Earth is one city and Utopia set up therein" (207).

As in *The Time Machine* there are mixes of both utopian and dystopian elements in the story. However, unlike the natural dystopian elements in *The Time Machine*, the bad or dangerous elements come from the travellers that accompany Mr Barnstaple. Their lack of acceptance and fear of the alien world makes them blind to many of the achievements that the Utopians have accomplished. They are horrified when they find out that certain taboos such as population control or sex outside the marriage occur. They can also not fathom why there is no leader or hierarchy in the social system. Eventually, the travellers' rebel against the utopians and only Mr Barnstaple, who has accepted their ways, is allowed to return to Earth. The utopians do also have a certain cold uniformity that lacks individualism, despite the fact that individual achievement is a very large part of their way of thinking. In my opinion, it is evident that communal gain is perceived in the novel as something more important than democratic individual freedom: "Life is intolerant of all independent classes, said Crystal, evidently repeating an axiom. Either you must earn or you must rob... We have got rid of robbing" (186). In the end, however, the utopian elements definitely overpower the dystopian,

as the author constantly reminds the reader that through education and common goals, we can put the horrors of war and conflict behind us and make a better future for coming generations.

Wells' utopian ideas have been the subject of much discussion and criticism. Coupland (2000) describes Wells' future as liberal fascism and suggests that his radical socialism has tipped the scales between extreme left to extreme right. The next chapter will look at the negative responses to Wells utopian agenda, both in modern times and especially from his contemporaries.

Chapter three: The Prophet

Earlier in this essay, I discussed how H.G. Wells after World War One moved away from writing Scientific Romances or Adventure novels; instead he started to focus on a political idea that is depicted in the novel *Men Like Gods*. The idea is built upon socialist ideals and expresses the belief that governing, or more correctly, leadership, should be given to those who have the best education and skill at their given task. The political agenda also calls for the creation of a world state that will control most aspects of human life within the boundaries for democratic freedom (Spartacus Educational, 2012). Wells tries to persuade his audience with vivid pictures of fantastic technology or with human beings totally in control of their environment and of their own natural flaws, whilst still being utterly free from any outside involvement. Gone are the previous writings of imminent catastrophe or prophetic warnings about mankind overreaching or destroying the natural order. The brave and enigmatic inventor of *The Time Machine* has been replaced with the zealous liberal socialist, whose goal is to create a better world through a peaceful revolution, using education as a tool that slowly creates change.

However, many of Wells' contemporaries did not share his socialistic views or believed that the creation of a world state would in any way create a better life for the people of England or anywhere. Although criticised, Wells was considered to be an "important political thinker" (Spartacus Educational, 2012) despite the fact that he disregards many important democratic ideas. During a lecture called "Democracy under Revision" (1927) he said: "That we are in the beginning of an age whose broad characteristics may be conveyed some day by calling it the Age of Democracy under Revision. The magic has gone out of the method of government by general elections..." (645). So Wells more or less disregards democratic elections; instead he is more focused on a realized anarchy, as discussed in the previous chapter, that can be acquired by technological advances and through educating the world in the principles of liberty from *Men Like Gods*. Wells was not afraid of giving his opinion on a wide variety of subjects and most of his direct thoughts wound up being used in his books; political views, scientific progress, social inequalities and the state of the human condition. Nothing was holy or regarded as too difficult to write about.

H.G. Wells was a highly prolific writer, both in non-fiction and fiction. He dared to speak his mind and give opinion on subjects others were hesitant about and he especially gave his audience a clear indication about what to expect in the future. Partington (2004: 46) provides a quote by George Orwell describing Wells: "Up to 1914 Wells was in the main a true prophet. In physical details his vision of the new world has been fulfilled to a surprising extent." But, after 1930 there was a reaction against his ideas and his reputation was forever damaged by those critics, several of whom had been positive towards Wells till the 1920s. There are two publications, in particular, that describe the weaknesses and direct faults of Wells' political theories and beliefs. One is the popular novel *Brave New World* by Aldous Huxley, a satirical novel, a direct response to *Men Like Gods*. The other is a magazine article in *The Horizon* (1941), written by George Orwell, called "Wells, Hitler and the World State."

The article heavily criticises Wells' views of creating a world state and Orwell attacks Wells' criticisms of war and all those who perpetrate it as evil. During the time Britain stands almost alone against the overwhelming power of the German armed forces and Wells had previously commented on the fact that Germany had spent its best men and forces in World War One: he, like many others, also regarded Hitler as little more than a screaming maniac. Orwell continues to berate Wells for his lack of national pride, which at the time did not sit well with the public when the nation faced war and a determined adversary. It did not sit well with Orwell that Wells and the left-wing elite ignored the facts that the only way to stop the Third Reich was to fight another world war. Both Orwell and Huxley oppose Wells' thoughts regarding scientific progress in the control of an educated public as the beacon of light, representing all good things about human nature. Orwell claims that Wells no longer represents the modern world and is totally outdated in his views:

Only, just the singleness of mind, the one-sided imagination that made him seem like an inspired prophet in the Edwardian age, makes him a shallow, inadequate thinker now. When Wells was young, the antithesis between science and reaction was not false. Society was ruled by narrow-minded, profoundly incurious people, predatory businessmen, dull squires, bishops, politicians who could quote Horace but had never heard of algebra. Science was faintly disreputable and religious belief obligatory. ("Wells, Hitler and the World State", 1941)

Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*, published in 1932, is a dystopian novel based on Wells' idea of a world state and was written as a satirical response to Wells novel *Men Like Gods*, but is also a satire of Huxley's own consumer-based society. In the novel, Huxley creates a world state where humans are controlled by technology. Huxley warns against the so-called

“progress” through the means of science, and he wanted to express caution against unrestricted technological progress, since its goal would only be to further enhance the technology itself; the tool in human hands would eventually be all there is. In the novel humans are conditioned with constant platitudes that remind them of their role and the perfect system that supposedly surrounds them; the platitudes have a very similar theme to what H.G. Wells’ character is learning in *Men Like Gods*, that all must work only for the good of society and that existence cannot be justified without purpose for that society. “Everyone works for everyone else. We can’t do without any one. Even Epsilons are useful. We couldn’t do without Epsilons. Everyone works for everyone else. We can’t do without anyone...” (*Brave New World*: 64).

I find Wells’ Utopia a world that is very much shaped by control, control of the environment and human development through means of genetic transformation is considered a perfect solution to prevent harmful animals or unwanted personalities to cause any harm to the system and it is frequently stated that it is through education that salvation from the undesirable past can, and has been found: “For centuries now Utopian science has been able to discriminate among births and nearly every Utopian alive would have ranked as an energetic creative spirit in former days” (54). I agree with both Orwell and Huxley’s criticisms of Wells. Orwell, I think, finds Wells outdated and that Wells has turned into something that he has strived to avoid for his entire life: a conservative and static character in a world that has changed too fast for him. Huxley delves deeper into Wells’ novel *Men Like Gods* and sees the dangers of mixing technology and unchecked power. In my opinion, Wells does not take into account human nature when describing his Utopia. Huxley, on the other hand, sees a darker dystopian nature in Wells’ world, and it is just such a society that he describes in *Brave New World*.

However, even though Wells' political views were controversial, and in some cases radical, it does not mean that his predictions were incorrect. Today, man has become more skilful at using technology to create better conditions for ourselves, and social reform has occurred thanks to unifying organisations with common goals, such as the UN or the EU. Wells was trying throughout the 1920's and 1930's to describe a new solution by taking the best of democratic values and mix them with progressive socialist ideas that represented a change from the burdened and often undisclosed way of making politics in his day.

Conclusion

This essay has explored the dystopian and utopian literature of the author H.G. Wells by discussing two of his novels: *The Time Machine* and *Men Like Gods*. The first chapter has discussed Wells' background by looking at the conditions of Victorian England and his reaction to this society in his dystopian novel *The Time Machine*. The second chapter delved into the philosophical mindset of the author and compared his writing previous to World War One, with a novel written after that event. The chapter argued the change in mindset caused by World War One and the effect this had on Wells' writing; as he moved from writing one-sided social critique to writing his description of a perfect society in the novel *Men Like Gods*. The third chapter analysed his political ideas by discussing some of the statements he made during the time and by the criticism he received by his contemporary authors. This essay has argued that Wells used both dystopian and utopian elements in both novels. However, unlike the pre-war novel, that did not provide solution to the problems he inferred, the post-war novel contained ideas on what his own society should strive towards to ensure a better future for all mankind. The purpose of this essay was to give the reader a greater insight into a period that has shaped the modern Western society. The ideologies and wars of this period shaped our most basic standards and norms. The author Herbert George Wells has had an enormous influence on the discourse and the debate surrounding what we, as a society, should strive towards to live in peace and prosperity and through his works we, as readers, gain knowledge of our past and, perhaps, also of our future.

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