

A “SILK-SHOT” VOICE:
CONSTRUCTING SOCIAL HISTORY
IN THE FUTURE-BOUND NOVELS OF H.G. WELLS

by

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ABSTRACT: This thesis argues that H.G. Wells' attempts to craft a successful narrative of the predicted future, as viewed through three primary texts (*Anticipations*, *A Modern Utopia* and *The Shape of Things to Come*) are not only trials at the most effective textual platform for his social ideology but also explicit attempts to create a new hybrid literature. The author first embarks on a close reading of *Anticipations* to analyze Wells' social ideology and his early theory of the role of fiction. Next, the author examines the two later novels, *A Modern Utopia* and *The Shape of Things to Come*, reading their forms and content against *Anticipations*. Using all three texts, the author constructs a theory about Wells' final beliefs regarding the role of literature in education, society, and history.

INTRODUCTION

In 1901, H.G. Wells opens *Anticipations*, his first major piece of prophetic nonfiction, with the following appeal: “Fiction is necessarily concrete and definite; it permits of no open alternatives. . . . The very form of fiction carries with it something of disavowal; indeed, very much of the Fiction of the Future pretty frankly abandons the prophetic altogether, and becomes polemical, cautionary, or idealistic, and a mere footnote and commentary to our present discontents.”¹ This clear distinction between the functions and values of fiction and nonfiction seems to reject outright the mode of fiction – of which the novel is a central force – as able to perform the serious, prophetic, and multifaceted debate that Wells seeks to pursue. The utility of fiction to embark on a project of socio-political and philosophical discourse is dismissed by Wells, in this early text, as limited at best. Wells makes this claim despite his already prolific career beginnings in the field of science-fiction, which includes two explicitly “Fiction of the Future”-type novels, *The Time Machine* (1895) and *The War of the Worlds* (1898). In *Anticipations*, Wells positions himself as seeking something greater than such novels can functionally and *formally* accomplish. However, ten years later, Wells writes in his essay, “The Contemporary Novel”, “So far as I can see, [the novel] is the only medium through which we can discuss the great majority of the problems which are being raised in such bristling multitude by our contemporary social development.”² By 1911, Wells’ opinion of the capabilities of a specific mode of fiction – the novel – has broadened to include not only “polemical, cautionary or idealistic” extrapolations, but an open spectrum of considerations. “The novel,” Wells argues,

¹ H.G. Wells, *Anticipations* (Las Vegas: IAP, 2009) 5.

² Leon Edel and Gordon N. Ray, *Henry James and H.G. Wells: A Record of their Friendship, their Debate on the Art of Fiction, and their Quarrel* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1958) 148.

“I hold to be a discursive thing; it is not a single interest, but a woven tapestry of interests ... It is something to return to, and I do not see that we can possibly set any limit to its extent.”³

How is one to reconcile these opposing views? It is tempting to explain them by the decade between them – it would be quite logical to claim that time had changed the mind of a man whose writing career spanned over half a century, and at least half as many genres. However, a closer inspection proves to complicate both this initial explanation, and the nature of the views themselves. Though *Anticipations* positions itself as a nonfiction text dealing with the industrial and social problems of the day, this landmark piece provides the first and most concrete description of Wells’ “New Republic” and is forward-searching; it not only describes how the industrial revolution affects social relationships in 1901, but looks into the future, predicting how these changes will evolve over time. Its prophesizing, though generated through a meticulous examination of contemporary facts and figures, is an endeavor that is not, strictly speaking, non-fictional. As such, *Anticipations* is widely viewed by the critical community as the first in a series of prophetic texts by Wells, which have varying degrees of fictional and nonfictional content and include novels that are categorized as fiction. Wells himself refers to *Anticipations* as “the keystone to the main arch of my work” as late as 1934 – an arch which includes a range of fictional and experimental texts.⁴ On the other hand, Wells’ defense of the novel is itself a call for a wider purpose for fiction. “The success of civilization amounts ultimately to a success of sympathy and understanding,” Wells writes. “And in this tremendous work of human reconciliation and elucidation, it seems to me it is the novel that must attempt most and achieve most.”⁵ Wells advocates for the novel not in terms of its intrinsic artistic value, but for its ability to “attempt most and achieve most” in the realms of human enlightenment,

³ Edel and Ray 136.

⁴ Norman and Jeanne Mackenzie, *H.G. Wells: A Biography* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1973) 161.

⁵ Edel and Ray 151-152.

understanding, and progress – goals which go beyond the text and into the physical, socio-political world.

The tension between Wells' theory of the role of literature, on the one hand, and his theory of social evolution on the other, is ultimately the underlying and creative force behind his experiments in prophetic literature. In each of these texts, Wells explicitly struggles with his desire to strike a careful balance within his narrative mode, permitting of greater authorial freedom and the illustration of his social ideology, while retaining a rigorous analysis of current (and predicted future) affairs. His experiments in fiction and nonfiction create a dialogue that not only interrogates the nature of both as authorial modes, but examines the relationship between "history-making" and "story-making". Wells' trials at the most effective textual platform for his social ideology are also his explicit attempts to craft a new form of history-writing, one that is inclusive of both factual and fictional elements. Wells aims for the creation of an ideal prophetic literature that can accurately predict future events, engages in a socio-political discourse with the public of the present day, and embodies an aesthetic that does not merely please the reader, but educates him. In so doing, Wells seeks to engage in a rigorous documentation of the present and future which, like a historical account, presents accurate, nonfictional knowledge to the reader. At the same time, Wells inscribes this historical interrogation within the parameters of a finely constructed and defended literary framework. Ultimately, what at first appears to be a series of experiments can be more clearly defined as a growing authorial consciousness of the need for a hybrid literature, one that is able to explore the fullest extents of the novelistic form while engaging powerfully with the outside world – a literature that succeeds as both art and utility. Wells quests for a mode of narrative that can assemble a global human history, driven by his ideology of social evolution, while retaining his authorial individualism. In doing so, Wells seeks

a literature that can combine fact and fiction, which is self-aware of its own textual structure and composition, and which is accessible to a global readership. His project is a necessarily contradictory one, for where his texts succeed as “good histories”, they may fail as “good stories” – where they command the reader’s emotional investment, they may lose the factual detail that bolsters Wells’ political argument. Yet in Wells’ ambitious project of “[attempting] most and [achieving] most”, this contradiction is not only necessary, but essential to the definition of the new genre that he crafts, as “prophetic”.

Anticipations can be viewed not only as the “keystone” that bridges the ideology of Wells’ later prophetic texts, but also as the beginning of a new strain of textual self-awareness. *Anticipations* explicitly asks what its form and function should be – and answers these questions directly in its introduction, and indirectly through the breadth of its content. It begins a project of melding form and content that Wells continues over the course of his career, as his literary and political ideologies mature and coalesce. Two novels in particular stand out as self-consciously experimenting with form and function, while also explicitly engaging in a prophetic discourse about future history: *A Modern Utopia* (1905) and *The Shape of Things to Come* (1933). Written at opposing ends of Wells’ career, both novels engage with the questions posed by *Anticipations* while utilizing the novel as their platform for open debate. Both texts systematically explore a logically-possible world state as developed out of contemporary human conditions, while using a variety of literary devices to construct their pseudo-historical narratives. In each novel, Wells makes a genuine appeal for a new world order in the same way that he does in his nonfiction – the role of fiction, and his use of it, has changed from “a footnote” to an integral tool in the larger socio-political discussion. Furthermore, each of these novels experiments with form in a way that

alludes to the writing process itself, and calls attention to the fundamentally patchwork nature of history-making and story-making alike.

The implications of Wells' formal experimentations are much greater when taken in the context of his socio-political ideology, which is focused on creating a universal language and common global history. To tell the right story of the world in the right way is not merely a literary game – it determines the very destiny of humanity. For, as Wells notes, it is only when society is able to conceive of a global history and universal story, and has knitted it into an accessible narrative, that a utopic World State is possible. “There must be a literature to embody their common idea, of which this Modern Utopia is merely the material form,” Wells writes; action must be preceded and governed by a comprehensive and comprehensible story.⁶

For Wells, the ultimate purpose of his art is “to explain and defend his participation in national and even world affairs as a journalist, an activist, and a subject of controversy and scandal” – to create art that effectively embodied and communicated his ideological message.⁷ To what extent is this project of Wells' undermined by his own authorial hand? In the pages to follow, this paper shall examine Wells' political and literary ideologies; his conception of a World State in its varying forms; his discourse on the utility of fiction; and the content of two novels which conceive of ideal global communities. But equally important are the ways in which these novels, and Wells' surrounding discourse, undermine the universality of their messages; how their histories are fabricated; how they rely on unreliable narrators; and how in his quest for mass communication and mass culture, Wells refuses to neglect the individual narrative. Wells searches for a universal hybrid literature that can unite and educate the world en masse, yet continues to advocate for the power of the individual, creative consciousness. For Wells, a

⁶ H.G. Wells, *A Modern Utopia* (London: Penguin Books Limited, 2005) 91.

⁷ John Huntington, *Critical Essays on H.G. Wells* (Boston: G.K. Hall & Co., 1991) 2.

perfect literature does not create a homogeneous, robotic world; rather, it seeks to unite the individual artistic consciousness with a greater social purpose, and to endow the technology-driven populace with a wider, more creative breadth of knowledge. In *Anticipations, A Modern Utopia* and *The Shape of Things to Come*, Wells critiques traditional forms of history-making and struggles to create a new process, a process he hopes will harmonize the individual creator and the mass executor, the artistic and the scientific – fact and fiction – into a global narrative of the future world.

ANTICIPATIONS: A Foundation, a Keystone, and a Future Paved

Anticipations of the Reaction of Mechanical and Scientific Progress upon Human Life and Thought, generally known as *Anticipations*, is Wells' first major work of social prophecy. It begins as a reflection upon the technological and social changes contemporary with Wells' world during 1901, and expands into a theory of social revolution and the rising of the "New Republic," a system of world governance similar to his later theories of utopia and the World State. In "H.G. Wells and the Evolution of Some Geographic Concepts", Brian Blouet describes the text: "*Anticipations* was, and remains, a remarkable book which contains numerous scientific and social prognostications concerning the 20th century."⁸ *Anticipations* has garnered the critical attention of a variety of professions over the century since its publication, including geographers, sociologists, political theorists and literary critics. Its critical reception and its "numerous scientific and social prognostications" have remained a part of Wells' enduring legacy; it stands as a testament to Wells' diversity and depth of knowledge in a variety of fields.

Wells opens *Anticipations* by immediately laying out his intention to the reader, in clear propositions:

It is proposed in this book to present in as orderly an arrangement as the necessarily diffused nature of the subject admits, certain speculations about the trend of present forces, speculations which, taken all together, will build up an imperfect and very hypothetical, but sincerely intended forecast of the way things will probably go in this new century. ... Hitherto such forecasts have been presented almost invariably in the form of fiction, and commonly the provocation of the satirical opportunity has been too much for the writer; the narrative form becomes more and more of a nuisance as the speculative inductions become sincerer, and here it will be abandoned altogether in favor of a texture of frank inquiries and arranged considerations.⁹

⁸ Brian Blouet, "H.G. Wells and the Evolution of Some Geographic Concepts", *Area* 9.1 (1977) 49.

⁹ *Anticipations* 5.

Wells introduces his project with the rational terminology of a scientist. He speaks of the flow of his text as an “orderly arrangement”; organizes his “speculations”, like scientific observations, into a unified hypothesis of the “intended forecast of the way things will probably go”; and is careful to separate his intention from the project of a fiction writer. His main claim against a fictional format in this passage is his belief that it serves as a distraction to the potentially serious writer, who cannot resist the “satirical opportunity” which the text provides. Secondary is his assertion that the narrative form becomes a “nuisance” for the serious writer, as though it is too much trouble to be concerned with both frank inquiries and the pursuit of a serious line of questioning at the same time. Wells thus distances himself from his role as a popular storyteller and steps fully into the profession of social scientist, who is embarking on a rigorous method that cannot afford to be bogged down with narrative embellishment.

It is not an anomaly, nor an accident, that Wells begins this way. Wells’ background and training in the physical and social sciences, as well as his independent studies of politics and economics, consistently affected his literary career. In 1884, Wells enrolled at the Normal School of Science in South Kensington as a teacher-in-training, taking a course in pure sciences and spending part of his first year under the direction of T.H. Huxley, who would become a major contributor to his political worldview.¹⁰ Murray Hausknecht notes that Wells

was more than just a master story-teller; he was a serious essayist in the fields of economics and sociology. If we examine those studies (particularly the early ones, which he wrote as a social scientist), we can see in them the same spirit and consciousness that animates the contemporary scientific worker.”¹¹

Hausknecht goes on to observe that “Wells’ scientific ethos colored the whole of his thought; he was the prime exponent of what may be called a ‘scientific way of life’.”¹² Although the project

¹⁰ John S. Partington, *Building Cosmopolis* (Hampshire: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2003) 27.

¹¹ Murray Hausknecht, “H.G. Wells: A Modern Primitive”, *American Journal of Economics and Sociology* 9.2 (1950) 205.

¹² Hausknecht 206.

of *Anticipations* to explicitly prophesize about a wide variety of technological and social developments may be seen as new for Wells, his “scientific” method of approaching it was anything but.

Anticipations takes as its primary foci the rapidly increasing populations of the industrialized modern world, and the technology developing in tandem with them. Urbanization and an increasingly predominant locomotive system transformed the world of Wells’ youth into an environment of big cities, factory labor and production, and a redistributed class system:

Let us consider the broad features of the redistribution of the population that has characterized the nineteenth century. It may be summarized as an unusual growth of great cities and a slight tendency to depopulation in the country. The growth of the great cities is the essential phenomenon. . . . It will be convenient to make the issue part of a more general proposition, namely, that *the distribution of population in a country must always be directly dependent on transport facilities.*¹³

With ever increasing global transportation made possible by a new train network, the face of England, and the world at large, was changing drastically. For Wells, this demographic shift signaled a need to look to the future in order to develop social and governmental systems able to handle and control population growth and trans-national travel. The task of managing a population and a technology that seemed to grow more rapidly than ever was, for Wells, a very serious one – and for this reason, his future-searching “anticipations” required an equally serious narrative mode.

Not only were the population and technology expanding, at least in Wells’ immediate vicinity, but these growths were creating a drastic shift in the socio-economic structure of Europe during the turn of the 20th century.¹⁴ “The essential change in the social fabric,” remarks Wells,

¹³ *Anticipations* 19-20.

¹⁴ The actual extent to which the classical Industrial Revolution (1760-1840) and second industrial growth spurt of the late 19th century drastically affected the economic and social state of England has been disputed by some social scientists. See: “Industrial Growth and Industrial Revolutions”, D.C. Coleman, 1956. However, it is fair to say that there is personal and historical evidence for *some* change in social and economic structure, and that the

“as we have analyzed it, is the progressive supersession of the old broad labor base by elaborately organized mechanism, and the obsolescence of the once valid and necessary distinction of gentle and simple.”¹⁵ Traditional feudal socio-economic systems, relying on a base of unskilled rural labor, gave way – or at least made room – for a new, technologically-driven middle class and urban poor. Wells describes this change in the social fabric of English life as producing four distinct social effects. First, he notes the “element of irresponsible property” – that is, socio-economic status as no longer tied to landed property. Second, “the helpless superseded poor, that broad base of mere toilers now no longer essential” – the rural poor, displaced, and the urban poor whose lack of education had left them bereft of work as unskilled labor was quickly being overtaken by automatic machinery. Third, he observes that a large portion of the population are engaged, “more or less consciously”, in practical scientific pursuits: the fields of engineering, medicine, science and pseudo-science, urban planning, and a wide variety of technological research. Fourth, Wells distinguishes a population separate from the displaced unskilled poor, simply described as “a possibly great number of non-productive persons living in and by the social confusion” – people who, for whatever reason, simply could not keep up with the changing pace of the world.¹⁶ “All of these elements will be mingled confusedly together,” concludes Wells. “They are developing, as it were unconsciously, under the stimulus of mechanical developments, and with the bandages of tradition hampering their movements.”¹⁷

Based upon his assessments of the contemporaneous changes affecting his current life as a result of population redistribution and technological advancement, Wells begins to craft a

demographical migration to urban areas and the expansion of these cities is a notable aspect of the 19th century, as Wells claims here.

¹⁵ *Anticipations* 79.

¹⁶ *Anticipations* 46.

¹⁷ *Anticipations* 46.

theory of how these conditions would continue, and how society should reorganize itself to accommodate them. In Wells' early view, the solutions for each of these effects are interrelated and easily articulated. Wells argues that the third social effect, a burgeoning scientific class, is what will ultimately dictate the future history of the world. While the scientific class was a heterogeneous cluster of independently-operating sub-groups, working with different resources and levels of education, Wells argues that over time, this class would become a homogeneous, mass-educated, and global task force:

At present, it would be almost impossible to describe such thing as a typical engineer, to predicate any universally applicable characteristic of the engineer and mechanic. ... But is it likely that this will remain a rude levy? ... For all this next century this particular body of mechanics will be picking up new recruits and eliminating the incompetent and the rule-of-thumb sage. Can it fail, as the years pass, to develop certain general characters, to become so far homogeneous as to be generally conscious of the need of a scientific education, at any rate in mechanical and chemical matters, and to possess, down to its very lowest ranks and orders, a common fund of intellectual training?¹⁸

Wells presents his view of the future as the only logical alternative – at least for a future world state which is productive, successful, and able to manage its working classes. For Wells, the introduction of mass transportation technology – specifically, the new railway systems and early beginnings of the automotive industry – was not only significant scientifically, but socially. The conjunction of these social and scientific changes, in Wells' view, was leading to an entirely new global environment, which was quickly outgrowing its current national- and regional-based system of governance. The introduction of a world state would not only eliminate discrepancies in global communication, but would promote a wider range of knowledge and skills for all humans. No longer would certain pockets of national communities fall short of the skillset necessary to deal with the technology of the new modern world. It is important to note that Wells describes this ideal social body as “homogeneous” at several points – a community of equal

¹⁸ *Anticipations* 40-41.

types, whose equal access to knowledge has rendered them harmonious in near-perfect similarity:

I am dealing not with the specific community, but with the generalized civilized community of A.D. 2000 – we disregard the fate of states and empires for a time – and, for that emergent community, wherever it may be, it seems reasonable to anticipate, replacing and enormously larger and more important than the classes of common workmen and mechanics of today, a large fairly homogenous body – big men and little men, indeed, but with no dividing lines – of more or expert mechanics and engineers, with a certain common minimum of education and intelligence, and probably a common-class consciousness – a new body, and force, in the world’s history.¹⁹

Wells’ theory of the typified engineer of the future may be seen to have its basis in the birth of entirely new social communities oriented around technology emerging directly before, and during, his lifetime. In “Socialism and the Second Industrial Revolution”, K Vijayachandran observes that the technology introduced during and immediately after the “classical” Industrial Revolution created its own new system of human interaction. Vijayachandran further argues that these technologies “socialised” the processes of production and physical labor in brand new ways. Vijayachandran writes:

The use of steam engines and energy conversion machines for material processing and transportation of men and materials across the continents, had socialised the process of physical production to unprecedented levels, and at the same time enhanced by several fold, the physical productivity of mankind.²⁰

Vijayachandran argues from a socialist perspective that this process of socialisation in the new urban lower class workforce was mirrored in the bourgeois class, who were engaging in the creation of new social hierarchies and hegemonies such as those that Wells described: power without landed property, stock trading, and the building of new nation states. Vijayachandran’s modern argument mirrors that of Wells, in that it advocates for the creation of a world state while simultaneously accepting the restrictions of such a state to form under the conditions of the

¹⁹ *Anticipations* 43-44.

²⁰ K. Vijayachandran, “Socialism and the Second Industrial Revolution”, *Economic and Political Weekly* 43.33 (August 2008) 74.

Industrial Revolution. This argument also assists the reader in explicating Wells' theory of social evolution. Wells was acutely aware that the world of 1901 (and of his later life) was unfortunately mired in its nationalistic ways, which created an unequal social hierarchy, perpetrated an uneducated and impoverished lower class, and inhibited the true capabilities of scientific progress. Wells would later mirror these anticipations in *The Shape of Things to Come*, noting retrospectively that

steam power, oil power, electric power, the railway, the steamship, the aeroplane, transmission by wire and aerial transmission followed each other very rapidly. They knit together the human species as it had never been knit before. Insensibly, in less than a century, the utterly impracticable became not merely a possible adjustment but an urgently necessary adjustment if civilization was to continue.²¹

The turn from national to global leadership was an "urgently necessary adjustment" for Wells, one that was the only logical alternative for a positive world future. *Anticipations* thus paved the way not only for a new type of literary trend for Wells, but also for the development of a consistent, socialist-inclined social philosophy which was to continue through *A Modern Utopia* and *The Shape of Things to Come*.

What are the means necessary to achieve this world state, where all humans are on equal social, economic, and mental terms, a homogenous mass of educated and technologically-savvy ideal citizens? This was the question which Wells began to pursue with the publication of *Anticipations*, but would as seriously interrogate in his prophetic future novels. In *Anticipations*, Wells addresses this question not in terms of the chronological details which he would later outline in *The Shape of Things to Come*, but in broader strokes. Wells' most explicit answer to the question of means in *Anticipations* can be seen in his value-laden descriptions of what ought to be done, not in regards to those who are rising to the occasion of global citizenship, but to those who are not capable of keeping up. Wells describes the future as a gradual mass process of

²¹ H.G. Wells, *The Shape of Things to Come* (London: Penguin Books Limited, 2005) 32.

social evolution, by which the “helpless, superceded poor” and those “non-productive” castaways of society are gradually exterminated. To achieve the global utopia which is the only rational way to a positive, stable future, Wells asserts, the inferior strains of the future race must be weeded out – those who cannot contribute to society or support themselves. Wells argues that the New Republic of his ideal world state “will make the multiplication of those who fall behind a certain standard of social efficiency unpleasant and difficult, and it will have cast aside any coddling laws to save adult men from themselves”.²² He continues:

The ethical system of these men of the New Republic, the ethical system which will dominate the world state, will be shaped primarily to favor the procreation of what is fine and efficient and beautiful in humanity – beautiful and strong bodies, clear and powerful minds, and a growing body of knowledge – and to check the procreation of base and servile types, of fear-driven and cowardly souls, of all that is mean and ugly and bestial in the souls, bodies, or habits of men.²³

Far from shying away from the terms through which his utopic world state might be achieved, Wells here turns a disturbingly practical eye to the “necessary” process of social evolution. In order to create a world composed of only intelligent men and women on a relative scale of mental, social and economic equality, it would certainly be necessary to determine how to settle the unequal classes into a level field – in short, how to deal with those at the extremes of wealth and poverty. As a student of Huxley and an “early world man” Wells’ solution is a pragmatic yet deeply flawed one, going beyond the mere “checking” of procreation into a much more sinister programme: “[The men of the New Republic] will naturally regard the modest suicide of incurably melancholy, or diseased or helpless persons as a high and courageous act of duty rather than a crime.”²⁴ Wells positions himself as a speaker on behalf of the New Republic and world state of the future, acknowledging that not everyone will be able to participate in his ideal world and praising those who fulfill their “duty” of self-extermination. As one critic writes, “In

²² *Anticipations* 135.

²³ *Anticipations* 129.

²⁴ *Anticipations* 129.

Anticipations, Wells considers reproduction from the point of view of the state and, therefore, advocates the culling of those not of use to the state.”²⁵

In *Anticipations*, Wells’ thesis is clear: to present his case for the only logical future alternative through a literary format permitting of rigorous analysis. Although Wells presents his text as a series of speculations or “anticipations”, in fact, he permits of no open alternatives – the utopic ideal that he tends to is the only option he offers for the survival of the human race. Any alternate path is implied to plunge the world into mass war, and finally mass extermination of the human race. “The law that dominates the future is glaringly plain,” writes Wells:

The rulers of the grey, the democratic politician and the democratic monarch, will be obliged year by year by the very nature of things to promote the segregation of colors within the grey, to foster the power that will finally supersede democracy and monarchy altogether, the power of the scientifically educated, disciplined specialist, and that finally is the power of saints, the power of the thing that is provably right. It may be delayed, but it cannot be defeated; in the end it must arrive.²⁶

Here and throughout *Anticipations*, Wells uses language that is imperative – “will be obliged”, “the power of the thing that is provably right”, “it must arrive”. Based upon his assessment of current affairs, Wells offers a theory of the future that professes itself to be the most logical, factually accurate alternative, and which is presented in a literary format that, unlike fiction, allows for a heightened level of socio-political analysis. This theory of the future is also presented, not coincidentally, as the *only*, inevitable, and truthful portrait of future events.

Although Wells claims that only a nonfiction format will allow him to refrain from “polemical” and “idealistic” extrapolations, Wells clearly presents his anticipations as truths in terms that are both controversial and idealistic. Wells describes a process of future-seeking that involves the necessary and unavoidable mass extermination of entire populations of people, and world warfare that leads to the assumption of global power by the most socially advanced nation.

²⁵ Partington 56.

²⁶ *Anticipations* 93-94.

Rather than suggesting alternatives to these paths to the future, Wells offers them as fact and narrates them not in tragic terms, but from the perspective of the triumphant future world state.

As author, Wells may be viewed as not only writing and editing his personal reflections, but as embarking on the writing and editing of history itself. As a social scientist, Wells cherry-picks which aspects of his contemporary world appear most important to future progress, and dismisses those which he feels are destined to die out. As a student of the physical sciences, Wells utilizes his uniquely adapted theories of social evolution to bolster his case and give the impression of their inherent, objective truth. But it is in his role as an author, and specifically one operating in the prophetic mode, that Wells not only molds his contemporary world to fit his ideological model, but conforms its development over time to fit his notion of social progress. Although Wells purports to write *Anticipations* as an objective account of the current and future world, his authorial style mirrors the narrative techniques utilized in fiction, involving both documentation of current affairs and the imaginative creation of future events. Wells' use of a rhetorical voice does not render *Anticipations* into a work of fiction, but does reveal where the author's priorities lie. Wells spends the majority of *Anticipations* creating a defensive argument for why Wells has made his authorial choices in form, subject matter, and predictions. Instead of merely focusing on factual data, Wells makes a point of drawing attention to his reasoning and authorial choices.

As has been noted and will be seen later in this paper, *Anticipations* also positions itself, critically, as the generator of later prophetic fiction. However, there are several significant deductions that one may make from the reading of *Anticipations* as Wells intends it – as a nonfiction discussion of the logical consequences of contemporaneous affairs. First, it allows the reader to examine Wells' proclamations in *Anticipations* as his actual opinions on social and

political events at the time, opinions that have been corroborated in several extraneous papers, letters, and writings of Wells'.²⁷ If the reader assumes this, *Anticipations* can be viewed as a comprehensive presentation of Wells' socio-political ideology – at least in its early stages – and can be read against his novels, which rarely present a straightforward or reliable account of Wells' thoughts in themselves. Secondly, and perhaps more interestingly, it allows the reader to dissect *Anticipations* as a social commentary, in the terms of 19th and early 20th century historiography. *Anticipations* is a predictive text that seeks to analyze the development of future affairs, and thus cannot be strictly categorized as historical. However, Wells' creation of a rhetorical voice, that continually seeks to define and justify his authorial mode, shares much in common with the field of historiography in the 20th century. Wells creates a non-historical text that nonetheless follows the shape of a rhetorical historical account, one that shapes its view of the past, present and speculative history through a carefully chosen and subjective narrative. Hayden White, author of *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, summarizes the field of 20th century historiography and argues that, like *Anticipations*, contemporaneous historical texts argued for a specific and subjective view of factual events. Moreover, the authors of these histories shared with Wells a desire to challenge and establish the very definition of their genre – to create, through the writing of it, the ideal historical account.

White notes that “history” was considered by nineteenth century historians to be not only a specific field of research, but a specific mode of existence or consciousness.²⁸ Through his analysis of figures including Michelet, Toqueville, Burckhardt, Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche, and Croce, White crafts a theory of historical composition that can be crudely distilled into two

²⁷ See Partington, *Bibliography*, 183-185 for an extensive sampling of such texts.

²⁸ Hayden White, *Metahistory* (Maryland: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973) 1.

central points: that the historian, or history-maker, is always operating within the terms of literary style; and that a historical text is always self-referential and self-conscious by nature.

White argues that such narrative frames are present not only in the rich field of 19th century history, but in the mode of history-writing at any time:

Histories (and philosophies of history as well) combine a certain amount of “data”, theoretical concepts for “explaining” these data, and a narrative structure for their presentation as an icon of sets of events presumed to have occurred in times past. In addition, I maintain, they contain a deep structural content which is generally poetic, and specifically linguistic, in nature, and which serves as the pre-critically accepted paradigm of what a distinctively “historical” explanation should be. This paradigm functions as the “meta historical” element in all historical works that are more comprehensive in scope than the monograph or archival report.²⁹

White observes that historical authorship is always anchored in an unspoken metacritical discourse of what the mode of history is and should be. In this sense, the historical author mirrors the fiction author in his quest – explicit or implicit – to define the nature of the formal beast with which he is dealing. In short, the way in which the historian chooses to present and explain his historical data, including the narrative arc with which he weaves his information together, mirrors the way in which a fiction author creates and sequences the parts of his text. In both cases, the writer’s literary choices can be analyzed as reflective of what his priorities are while crafting a narrative; the aspects of form and content that he brings to the forefront of his narrative are equally important as those that he conspicuously leaves out. In *Metahistory*, White describes the similarities between the issues encountered by the historian and those encountered by the fiction writer. He argues that the task of the historian, while grounded in “real life” data, is equally fraught with considerations of literary form, narrative sequencing, tone, and inventiveness in order to transcend a simple chronicle and enter the realm of history-making:

It is sometimes said that the aim of the historian is to explain the past by “finding,” “identifying,” or “uncovering” the “stories that lie buried in chronicles;

²⁹ White ix.

and that the difference between “history” and “fiction” resides in the fact that the historian “finds” his stories, whereas the fiction writer “invents” his. This conception of the historian’s task, however, obscures the extent to which “invention” also plays a part in the historian’s operations.³⁰

White argues that all histories can be viewed as essentially conforming to a mode or “style” of narrative interpretation – comedy, tragedy, epic, etc. – which shapes at least one aspect of the meaning derived from a given historical text. Furthermore, White argues that there is an intrinsically *poetic* quality to histories that is embedded in their linguistic structure – that their composition as *texts* makes their content dependent upon their literary form. In White’s view, it is the definition of what makes a “history” as opposed to a novel, play, poem or political treatise – “the pre-critically accepted paradigm of what a distinctively ‘historical’ explanation should be” – that dictates this form. Importantly, this de-emphasizes the traditional view of the historian’s work as objective or fact-driven; while histories may contain facts, they are ideologically biased in favor of this aforementioned paradigm, and secondarily biased in favor of the author’s style of writing, socio-political beliefs, and choices of what to include and what to omit. Consequently, the primary function of history-writing is not to document facts, as opposed to a chronicle, but to describe “what was *really* happening”.³¹ A given historian, in White’s view, is always working within the established parameters of what a history should be and should include, and either reinforcing or challenging this paradigm. In other words, through the writing of a historical account, each author implicitly conforms to the established genre of “history” – a linear narrative, attention to certain factual detail, discussion of widely-acknowledged social and political events, etc. – while also adding his own interpretation of events. Each historian’s personal values and beliefs informs not only what content he includes and omits in his historical account, but also in his ultimate definition of his own role as author. Nineteenth century

³⁰ White 6-7.

³¹ White x.

historians' and philosophers' "status as possible models of historical representation or conceptualization," White asserts,

does not depend upon the nature of the data they used to support their generalizations or the theories they invoked to explain them; it depends rather upon the consistency, coherence, and illuminative power of their respective visions of the historical field.³²

White's analysis of the nineteenth-century conception of historical writing creates a compelling examination of Wells' projects. Throughout Wells' works dealing with prophetic future history, the author has struggled to explicitly articulate his formal goals as well as his ideological conclusions. In each of the introductory passages to *Anticipations*, *A Modern Utopia* and *The Shape of Things to Come*, Wells prepares the reader not only for his ultimate conclusions regarding the importance of achieving a future world state, but details the processes by which he has considered, chosen, and executed the specific literary mode of each text. In *Anticipations*, Wells explicitly discusses his autobiographical writing process, outlining both the reasons for choosing a nonfictional format for his discussion of future affairs and the reasons for pursuing the specific topics in each section. Wells also discusses the reasons for the genre and form of *A Modern Utopia* in its introduction ("a silk-shot texture between philosophical discussion on the one hand and imaginative narrative on the other"³³), yet takes this a step further by engaging the Owner of the Voice in the same discussion. Wells' personal desire for a hybrid literary form, expressed in *Anticipations* in his own voice, is replaced in *A Modern Utopia* by the same discussion at several degrees of removal from Wells himself. In *A Modern Utopia*, the Owner of the Voice presents himself as the author of his own alternate history, and like Wells in *Anticipations* justifies the content he has included and his method of narration. At one point, having concluded an unsatisfying discussion with the Botanist, the Owner of the Voice remarks:

³² White 4.

³³ *A Modern Utopia* 6.

“Thank Heaven this is my book, and that the ultimate decision rests with me. It is open to him to write his own Utopia and arrange that everybody shall do nothing except by the consent of the savants of the Republic, either in his eating, drinking, dressing or lodging even as Cabot proposed.”³⁴ The Owner of the Voice is conscious of his own authorship and acknowledges the possibility of a different view, or even a different interpretation of the same events that he himself has planned. In *The Shape of Things to Come*, the two versions of Wells – the first who writes the overall novel, and the second who narrates it and intervenes as its editor – are also both engaging in the meta-historical dialogue of what their texts should be constituted by, and what they should mean.

Although Wells presents *A Modern Utopia* and *The Shape of Things to Come* as fictional texts, separated in category from *Anticipations*, his treatment of their form and content as self-conscious and engaged in a larger dialogue about the functions of literature and history easily positions them within the scope of White’s theory. White’s argument is ultimately one about the function of literary composition; whether it is applied to an explicitly “historical” narrative, an explicitly “fictional” narrative, or one posing as the other, it does not diminish in force. Even in the most “factual” of historical narratives, White notes, composition and literary structure plays an essential role:

First the elements in the historical field are organized into a chronicle by the arrangement of the events to be dealt with in the temporal order of their occurrence; then the chronicle is organized into a story by the further arrangement of the events into the components of a “spectacle” or process of happening, which is thought to possess a discernible beginning, middle, and end.³⁵

Such a process of ordering is a necessarily literary one, and a necessary part of authorship of any text that is engaged in the process of creating a narrative of any kind. By initiating a “process of happening”, the author is implicitly giving specific value to each of the pieces which he

³⁴ *A Modern Utopia* 51.

³⁵ White 5.

organizes – be they factual, or nonfactual. White’s theory of historiography allows the reader to link *Anticipations*, *A Modern Utopia* and *The Shape of Things to Come* in both their form and content. It has been demonstrated that *Anticipations* introduces itself as a self-conscious text concerned with its most effective literary format, and such is certainly the case with both of the novels considered in the following pages. All three texts are not only interested in their proper categorization – whether they should be read as a “history”, a “story”, or some hybrid form – but also directly concerned with the authorial hand that writes, edits, and intervenes to create nonlinear narratives.

Anticipations laid the foundation for not only Wells’ later political theory, but his later literary works, which would experiment with the proper form and message through which his ideology might break through to a common audience. Although Wells claimed that *Anticipations* could achieve a greater breadth of serious discussion than could a novel, his later fictional works may be read as directly following in its spirit and theoretical aim. *A Modern Utopia* and *The Shape of Things to Come* are both experimentations in two important relationships: the relationship between literary form and content, and the relationship between a socio-political message aimed at a global readership, and an individual creative voice and story. It is also important to note that in writing *Anticipations*, Wells was subject to artistic and theoretical limitations based upon the early stages of his socio-political theory, which was not yet fully formed. A deeper and more rigorous examination of the ideal world state – and the physical and literary means to achieve it – would have to wait until such later novels as *A Modern Utopia* and *The Shape of Things to Come*, the latter of which being particularly thorough in this respect. In *Building Cosmopolis: The Political Thought of H.G. Wells*, John Partington observes that

Anticipations, while a serious effort, was only the beginning of a much larger career path for Wells:

Although Wells' first non-fictional reference to a world state occurred in *Anticipations* in 1901, his early thought was vague, being simply the extrapolation of past tendencies onto future developments. Thus, the nature of that world state was a conglomeration of nations cooperating where their interests coincided and acting apart where individual national action seemed most appropriate. As a result of the Great War and the world economic depression, however, Wells' emphasis shifted greatly. He came to believe that where conflict between nations could arise, it *would* arise. Therefore he came to desire the merger of national sovereignties into functional transnational bodies in every department of state, from armaments and world policing to world health and education controls.³⁶

Partington describes *Anticipations* as offering a "vague" picture of a future world state, a concept that Wells would later refine both in terms of the end product (the state itself, as in *A Modern Utopia*) and in terms of the many stages of its gradual development (*The Shape of Things to Come*). Importantly, Partington's observation allows the critic to trace both of these later novels back to a common origin – and, in doing so, to create a literary genealogy that links fiction and nonfiction within the same family of work.

³⁶ Partington 1.

A MODERN UTOPIA: Global Narrative, Fractured

Switching focus from *Anticipations* to *A Modern Utopia* is no seamless exercise. Although the texts were published only 4 years apart (1901 and 1905, respectively), *A Modern Utopia* presents a completely inverse configuration of narrative structure and content. While *Anticipations* speculates broadly on the development and future implementation of new technologies and social systems, *A Modern Utopia* creates an open world where these systems are presented to the reader in their fully-formed state. Where *Anticipations* focuses on “process” – and *progress* – *A Modern Utopia* offers the final “product”. Critically, *A Modern Utopia* includes a fully-formed utopic state that exists chronologically in parallel with the current present – it is a “modern” utopia that remains within the capabilities of the modern world to achieve. One can read this utopia in two simultaneous ways: as a future state which the modern world is capable of achieving over time, and as a state that *could have been achieved* in Wells’ present, had history been written differently

In the “Biographical Note” to *A Modern Utopia*, Patrick Parrinder observes that the novel is not only linked to *Anticipations* in subject matter, but is actually directly informed by, and dependent on, its predecessor. Parrinder describes the socio-political doors that *Anticipations* opened for Wells, which would be incredibly important for the early phase of his careers in literature and political discourse:

[Wells’] first major non-fictional work was *Anticipations*, a book of futurological essays setting out the possible effects of scientific and technological progress in the twentieth century. *Anticipations* brought him into contact with the Fabian Society and launched his career as a political journalist and an influential voice of the British left. During his Fabian period Wells wrote *A Modern Utopia*, but failed in his attempt to challenge the bureaucratic, reformist outlook of the Society’s leaders such as Bernard Shaw (a lifelong friend and rival) and Beatrice Webb.³⁷

³⁷ *A Modern Utopia* x.

Based upon Parrinder's analysis of the historical conditions surrounding *Anticipations* and *A Modern Utopia*, the latter was written only as a result of Wells' growing social contacts and burgeoning ideology, that he began to put into practice among colleagues and within his writings. Consequently, *A Modern Utopia* may be seen as a direct descendent of *Anticipations* at least in theory, even if not entirely compatible through subject matter. Wells also explicitly proclaims *A Modern Utopia* as a descendent of *Anticipations* in his 1905 preface to the former, and goes so far as to speculate that *A Modern Utopia* might be the last of the type of works that *Anticipations* set in motion:

This book is in all probability the last of a series of writings, of which—disregarding certain earlier disconnected essays—my *Anticipations* was the beginning. Originally I intended *Anticipations* to be my sole digression from my art or trade (or what you will) of an imaginative writer. I wrote that book in order to clear up the muddle in my own mind about innumerable social and political questions, questions I could not keep out of my work, which it distressed me to touch upon in a stupid haphazard way, and which no one, so far as I knew, had handled in a manner to satisfy my needs. But *Anticipations* did not achieve its end. I have a slow constructive hesitating sort of mind, and when I emerged from that undertaking I found I had still most of my questions to state and solve. ... In its two predecessors [*Anticipations* and *Mankind in the Making*] the treatment of social organisation had been purely objective; here my intention has been a little wider and deeper, in that I have tried to present not simply an ideal, but an ideal in reaction with two personalities.³⁸

Wells' language here is satisfyingly explicit. He describes himself as embarking on a project to answer the nagging questions in his soul – questions he felt could not be answered in an imaginative fiction novel – and fails in providing the answers he seeks. *Anticipations* can be seen as setting into motion Wells' enduring pursuit of future history narratives precisely because it failed to provide the author with what he had intended. Although Wells may have intended *Anticipations* to be an end in itself, a marginal deviation from the bulk of his literary work, it only served to open the door to questions that would permeate not only his nonfiction essays, but his imaginative future texts – *A Modern Utopia* being the first of several.

³⁸ H.G. Wells, *A Modern Utopia*, Project Gutenberg (June 2013).

Anticipations and *A Modern Utopia* also share a common project of creating an ideal literary form for their respective messages – and justifying this form to the reader. As the reader has seen in its introduction, *Anticipations* positions itself as a serious inquiry requiring a “serious” literary form: nonfiction. *A Modern Utopia*, by contrast, offers the very opposite justification. The terms of Wells’ project may be seen in both versions of the preface to *A Modern Utopia*. It has been noted that Wells presented a preface in the 1905 first edition of *A Modern Utopia*; he offered a second version in the 1925 reprint, and subsequent editions of the novel. The 1925 preface conspicuously removed the earlier portion of its 1905 counterpart – the portion that has been quoted previously – offering instead an allusion to its presence: “The intentions of the experiment I tried to make clear in my preface to the first edition, and from that preface I will repeat here as much as will still interest the patient reader.”³⁹ In 1925, Wells viewed *A Modern Utopia* at the later part of his literary career, as its editor and compiler. This later Wells also recognized that *A Modern Utopia* was far from “the last of a series of writings” beginning with *Anticipations*; this is a compelling argument as to why he cut out this portion of the preface, while still acknowledging its existence. In both versions of the preface, however, Wells *does* maintain his crucial justification of the novel’s form and content. Wells’ justification of *A Modern Utopia* identifies his reasons for writing a work of utopian fiction, his target audience, and the ultimate end desired from his experiment:

The method assumes an air of haphazard, but it is not so careless as it seems. I believe it to be the best way to the sort of lucid vagueness which has been my intention in this matter. I tried over several beginnings of a Utopian book before I adopted this. I rejected from the outset the form of the argumentative essay, the form which appeals most readily to what is called the ‘serious’ reader, the reader who is often no more than the solemnly impatient parasite of great questions. He likes everything in hard, heavy lines, black and white, yes and no, because he does not understand how much there is that cannot be presented at all in that way;

³⁹ H.G. Wells, *A Modern Utopia* (London: Penguin Books Limited, 2005) 5.

wherever there is any effect of obliquity, of incommensurables, wherever there is any levity or humour or difficulty of multiplex presentation, he refuses attention.⁴⁰ Wells' preface to *A Modern Utopia*, in both incarnations, offers a different form of literature with the same stakes as *Anticipations*. Whereas *Anticipations* presents itself as a rational alternative to the fiction novel, allowing itself a serious discourse permitting of "open alternatives" and a meaty, intellectual conversation among its readership, *A Modern Utopia* asserts that it is exactly the nonfiction "serious essay" form, such as *Anticipations*, which closes itself off to open alternatives. Wells continues:

Even if I presented all my triclinic crystals as systems of cubes--! Indeed I felt it would not be worth doing. But having rejected the 'serious' essay as a form, I was still greatly exercised, I spent some vacillating months over the scheme of this book. I first tried ... the discussion novel... After that I tried to cast the thing into a shape resembling a little the double personality of Boswell's Johnson, a sort of interplay between monologue and commentator; but that, too, although it got nearer to the quality I sought, finally failed. Then I hesitated over what one might call 'hard narrative'. ... But I did not want to omit as much on this occasion. I do not see why I should always pander to the vulgar appetite for stark stories.⁴¹

Wells presents three options which he initially considered in crafting *A Modern Utopia*, all of which being types of novels having some success with general readership (the discussion novel, the Boswellian novel, and "hard narrative"). Each of these types is presented as a trial which panders to a particular "appetite" and audience, each falling short of a hybrid format which is able to achieve the "silk-shot" texture Wells craves. *A Modern Utopia* appeals not only to its particular fiction form as producing a more complex, interesting, and rigorous means to the socio-political message Wells seeks, but also to a more astute readership. The novel here establishes itself at a higher standard than both *Anticipations* and more popular fictional modes, looking for a particular reader who can understand and appreciate its complexities and accurately absorb its final message.

⁴⁰ *A Modern Utopia* 5.

⁴¹ *A Modern Utopia* 5-6.

A Modern Utopia does, however, establish itself as “serious” insofar as it purports to deviate from the traditional genre of utopia that permeated the 19th and early 20th centuries. Between 1875 and 1905, almost one hundred utopian fantasies were published, most forgotten and almost all dealing with “static”, pre-technological worlds.⁴² By contrast, Wells’ experiments in utopia aimed to present a *modern* utopia embedded within the technological climate of his time, a utopia “not static but kinetic, [shaping] not as a permanent state but as a hopeful stage leading to a long ascent of stages”⁴³. Although the description of utopia that follows presents itself as a parallel world which the narrator and his companion stumble into, in fact, Wells takes great pains to restrict this parallel world within the boundaries of logic. “Our proposal here,” the narrator (the Owner of the Voice) writes,

is upon a more practical plane. ... We are to restrict ourselves first to the limitations of human possibility as we know them in the men and women of this world today, and then to all the inhumanity, all the insubordination of nature. We are to shape our state in a world of uncertain seasons, sudden catastrophes, antagonistic diseases, and inimical beasts and vermin, out of men and women with like passions, like uncertainties of mood and desire to our own. And, moreover, we are going to accept this world of conflict, to adopt no attitude of renunciation towards it ... So much we adopt in common with those who deal not in Utopias, but in the world of Here and Now.⁴⁴

Here, Wells – through a characterized narrative voice, which shall be analyzed further – establishes the parameters of his utopic project as different from those utopic works that have been published in such large numbers already. He establishes a separate model for his own experiment in utopia, a model that serves a greater ideological purpose and is better equipped to engage with the problems and opportunities of the modern world. While previous utopias are implied by Wells to be static, remote, and non-functional, *A Modern Utopia* is described as endowed with all the properties of the post-Darwin, modern world. As Parrinder writes in

⁴² *A Modern Utopia* xvi.

⁴³ *A Modern Utopia* 11.

⁴⁴ *A Modern Utopia* 12-13.

Shadows of the Future, “One of the main reasons why we cannot mistake *A Modern Utopia* for a classic utopian text safe from time, death, and judgment is that the society it outlines is not the crystallization of a personal vision but a dynamic and synthetic construction.”⁴⁵ Wells rejects the notion that the ideal utopic project is purely a fantasy world of the author’s design, free from the repercussions of the “real world” it is rebelling from; instead, he presents his own utopia as something quite different from the norm, as born directly from a socio-political discourse that asks real-world questions, seeking practical answers.

In both its formal argument and historical context, *A Modern Utopia* thus positions itself as a child of *Anticipations* – while explicitly demonstrating the ways in which it will differ from its predecessor. *A Modern Utopia* also sets the stage for later experimental future fiction, particularly *The Shape of Things to Come*, in its insistence upon a layered narrative that obscures any clear-cut, singular reading. Although *A Modern Utopia* shares with *Anticipations* a common and clear political viewpoint, it offers a complex narrative framework that complicates its final interpretation. The most immediate and explicit example of this is the dual narratorship that Wells sets up before Chapter 1 begins, in an aside simply titled “The Owner of the Voice”. In this section, Wells identifies the narrator and describes him in detail for the reader, creating a “portrait of the author” that characterizes the narrative voice. Wells then introduces a second character, the Botanist, which operates as a foil to both the Owner of the Voice and Wells’ own ultimate authorial mode. Wells writes:

Throughout these papers sounds a note, a distinctive and personal note ... and all that is not, as these words are, in Italics, is in one Voice. Now this Voice, and this is the peculiarity of the matter, is not to be taken as the Voice of the ostensible author who fathers these pages. You have to clear your mind of any preconceptions in that respect. The Owner of the Voice you must figure to yourself as a whitish plump man, a little under the middle size and age, ... Him

⁴⁵ Parrinder *Shadows* 97.

*you must imagine as sitting at a table reading a manuscript about Utopias, a manuscript he holds in two hands that are just a little fat at the wrist.*⁴⁶

In addition to the Owner of the Voice, Wells also describes a second character known as the Botanist, a companion to the Owner of the Voice who is described only through the narrative of the Owner and presented as “*romantic with a shadow of meanness*”, a classic sentimentalist type.⁴⁷ Wells explicitly cautions the reader against viewing any of the pages following this passage – anything not in Italics – as authored by himself, or anyone except the Owner of the Voice. It is almost a familiar disclaimer to take none of the following words as the opinions or beliefs of the author himself, but simply of those of his narrator. This disclaimer is starkly contrasted with the introduction to *Anticipations*, which offers itself to be the true opinions and speculations of Wells himself, with no narrative intervention or secondary character involved. On the level of storytelling, then, Wells removes himself from the position of primary narrator, inserting a secondary figure through which his ideas are filtered – and a tertiary figure against which they are contrasted.

The Owner of the Voice is not a typical utopic hero; he is middle-aged, plump, staunchly anti-romantic and rather emasculated in both his physical appearance and social status. However, the Owner shares with Wells an ideological passion for his work, and the sense of a greater purpose for the utopia that he explores and creates through his papers. His companion, the Botanist, represents a figure whose ideals and beliefs center not around the progression of the human race and an ideal social community, like Wells and the Owner, but purely selfish goals. The Botanist is an obsessive romantic and individualist whose main preoccupation, throughout *A Modern Utopia*, is his convoluted personal romance. His secondary concern is with the utopia laid out by the Owner of the Voice, which embodies a world state not unlike that of

⁴⁶ *A Modern Utopia* 7

⁴⁷ *A Modern Utopia* 8

Anticipations' "New Republic", where society is educated en masse through global transportation, a universal language, and the extermination of those who are not able to socially evolve and adapt to the changing world. Initially, it appears as though Wells sets up a straightforward binary: on one hand, the Owner of the Voice, an unattractive, nonromantic figure who aspires toward a rational, global culture; and on the other, the Botanist, an attractive, romantic figure who aspires to maintain his individual identity and protests the Owner's vision of utopia at every turn. Parrinder bolsters this reading through his assertion that "throughout [*A Modern Utopia*] the narrative drive offered by the writer's search for his utopian double has been countered by the resistance set up by the botanist, who expresses humanity's recalcitrance in the face of the utopian spirit."⁴⁸ Wells initially does portray the Botanist as constantly undercutting the narrative drive established by the Owner of the Voice; while the Owner steadfastly presses on in his discussion of utopia and the possibilities of social evolution, the Botanist consistently interrupts this narrative, pulling it out of a linear discussion with his own emotional baggage. This is epitomized in the first chapter of *A Modern Utopia*, during the first scene where the Owner of the Voice and the Botanist appear together. The Owner's narrative opens on the two men taking a walk in the Swiss Alps, a walk that suddenly transports them into the parallel world of utopia. During their promenade, the Botanist interrupts the Owner's dialogue – his descriptions of his ideal utopia – with his romantic laments. A passing reference has reminded the Botanist of a woman he loved and lost, who still remains on his mind – "He had known her before he got his professorship, and neither her 'people' nor his – he speaks that detestable middle-class dialect in which aunts and things with money and the right of intervention are

⁴⁸ Patrick Parrinder, *Shadows of the Future: H.G. Wells, Science Fiction and Prophecy* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1995) 103.

called ‘people’! – approved of the affair.”⁴⁹ After listening to the Botanist for a time, the Owner of the Voice quickly dismisses this digression:

It is necessary to turn the botanist’s thoughts into a worthier channel. It is necessary to override these modest regrets, this intrusive, petty love story. Does he realize this is indeed Utopia? Turn your mind, I insist, to this Utopia of mine and leave these earthly troubles to their proper planet.⁵⁰

At first, it seems as though Wells positions the Botanist as a mere parody of the reactionary, romantic spirit that presents itself as a hindrance to the ideological mission of the Owner of the Voice – as, indeed, the obstacle necessary to overturn to achieve a true utopic state. However, this initial reading is quickly complicated by a number of factors. While the Botanist is presented in a less-than-flattering light, the Owner of the Voice is hardly a heroic figure; the image which Wells conjures of a portly gentleman dryly reading his pamphlets is none too appealing, either. More importantly, though, the Owner of the Voice is himself presented as upholding individualistic morals and ideals – at the very least, he understands that his vision of utopia is a subjective one. At one point, the Owner of the Voice considers whether alcohol should be allowed in his utopia. After deciding affirmatively, he justifies his choice: “Thank Heaven this is my book, and that the ultimate decision rests with me. It is open to him to write his own Utopia and arrange that everybody shall do nothing except by the consent of the savants of the Republic, either in his eating, drinking, dressing or lodging.”⁵¹ The Owner of the Voice critically acknowledges that while his proposed utopia attempts to create a world that benefits all humans, it does so from the subjective level of his own authorship. Furthermore, the Owner implies that the capability to write a future history is an *individual* one, subject to individual choices and preferences. Far from his picture of utopia being the only way, the Owner implies that there are many conceptions of utopia that are not less true for being different. As the “Owner

⁴⁹ *A Modern Utopia* 24.

⁵⁰ *A Modern Utopia* 25.

⁵¹ *A Modern Utopia* 51.

of the Voice,” it is his choice to create his own story and tell it as he chooses – but that does not close off the capabilities of other voices from conceiving of their own narratives. In self-referentially admitting the subjectivity with which he narrates, the Owner also asserts his own individualism. Although this seems to undercut his narrative of global unity, in fact, the Owner argues that individualism is a key to the development and maintenance of a utopic world state. “The factor that leads the World State on from one phase of development to the next,” the Owner writes,

is the interplay of individualities; to speak teleologically, the world exists for the sake of and through initiative, and individuality is the method of initiative. . . . It is impossible, therefore, for the State, which represents all and is preoccupied by the average, to make effectual experiments and intelligent innovations, and so supply the essential substance of life.⁵²

What, precisely, is the Owner of the Voice’s conception of utopia? The utopia presented in *A Modern Utopia* is theoretically similar to the New Republic of *Anticipations*, but introduces a variety of new ideas that become increasingly important during a consideration of *The Shape of Things to Come* several decades later. The Owner of the Voice first notes that his utopia will maximize the technological capabilities of modern trains and motor services, creating a global migratory population that is able to travel anywhere, anytime: “Our Utopia will have, of course, faultless roads and beautifully arranged interurban communications, swift trains or motor services or what not, to diffuse its population”.⁵³ This concept of a global transportation system mirrors that presented in *Anticipations*. However, *A Modern Utopia* adds to this vision a second and important aspect: the fusion of engineering and artistry. A true modern utopia, the Owner asserts, will not simply be a world overtaken by technology, but one whose technology is integrated with nature and the natural patterns of human life through an enlightened artistic sensibility. “In Utopia,” the Owner writes,

⁵² *A Modern Utopia* 64-65.

⁵³ *A Modern Utopia* 35.

a man who designs a tram road will be a cultivated man, an artist craftsman: he will strive, as a good writer or painter strives, to achieve the simplicity of perfection. He will make his girder and rails and parts as gracious as that first engineer, Nature, has made the stems of her plans and the joints and gestures of her animals. To esteem him as a sort of anti-artist, to count every man who makes things with his unaided thumbs an artist and every man who uses machinery as a brute, is merely a passing phase of human stupidity.⁵⁴

The citizen of the Owner's utopia, like the citizen of the New Republic, will be an educated person whose education is well-rounded – he will not be simply a scientist or an artist, but both. Not only will he have physical access to all parts of the world, but he will have access to all fields of knowledge, in no small part due to a global language and system of politics. “There must be a literature to embody their common idea, of which this Modern Utopia is merely the physical form,” the Owner asserts; “there must be some organization, however slight, to keep them in touch with the other.”⁵⁵ The utopia of the Owner's imagining is a world in which all is connected, in a natural and positive association: science, art, language, culture, politics. The Modern Utopia described in the novel is also, necessarily, a world state. This fact has been implied previously, but is essential to distinguish in its own right. Interestingly, however, the necessity of a world state is not approached as a desirable end in itself, but is presented as the consequence of the development of a state that is capable of keeping up with the technological progress of the modern world. As the Owner of the Voice puts it, “A State powerful enough to keep isolated under modern conditions would be powerful enough to rule the world, would be, indeed, if not actively ruling yet passively acquiescent in all other human organizations, and so responsible for them altogether. World State, therefore, it must be.”⁵⁶ The utopic citizen is a cosmopolitan, first and foremost, separated into his sphere of society through his level of devotion to the state.

⁵⁴ *A Modern Utopia* 79.

⁵⁵ *A Modern Utopia* 91.

⁵⁶ *A Modern Utopia* 15.

Also familiar in the Modern Utopia presented in this text is a purging of citizenry who's mental, physiological, creative, and emotional capacities do not fit the bill. As in *Anticipations*, those who would prevent the average global citizen from maintaining an enlightened status – those too poor, too deranged, or too inept – are gradually phased out of existence. The Owner of the Voice first notes that the new conditions brought about by physical science are such that make physical toil, and the laboring class associated with it, unnecessary.⁵⁷ However, Wells ventures a step further in his analysis by indicating that isolating, reducing and finally exterminating society's unwanted classes has a greater purpose than simply creating a model population of citizens – it actually enables the free communication necessary to achieving a utopic world state. The Owner of the Voice indicates, by example, the fact that vulnerable members of society – women and children – are unable to go freely and exercise their rights as citizens while “dangerous” people such as the diseased and insane are present in the public realm. He writes: “You must resort to a kind of social surgery. You cannot have social freedom in your public ways, your children cannot speak to whom they will, your girls and gentlewomen cannot go abroad while those sorts of people go free.”⁵⁸ Wells here seems to reframe his argument as to why the human population must be “edited” in order to achieve a global world state. In *Anticipations*, these groups are obstacles to the world order mainly because they are useless to the state; but in *A Modern Utopia*, they are not only useless but actually dangerous. *A Modern Utopia* also allows for a greater diversity of voices and personalities who are not characterized as useless or dangerous outright, though they may harbor ideas that run counter to the ideological course of the world state. Examples of these figures include the Botanist, as the reader has seen, as well as the Naturalist, a utopian which the two men encounter on their

⁵⁷ *A Modern Utopia* 73.

⁵⁸ *A Modern Utopia* 99.

journey who denounces the state and lives a vagrant, countercultural life in the wilderness. At the same time that *A Modern Utopia* views subcultural groups as a more dangerous threat to global safety, it also creates space for a more inclusive dialogue – one that allows for individual perspectives, multiple interpretations and multilayered storytelling.

A Modern Utopia takes as its primary focus the journey of two characters into a parallel world, a world which has been described thus far as a utopic state not unlike the New Republic of *Anticipations*. But how do the Owner of the Voice and the Botanist get to this world? On a basic level, they get there because Wells has put them there – because he has described to the reader the scene that he is to read, and it has unfolded. However, the scene has not actually progressed in the linear way that Wells, as initial narrator, told his reader in italics. Wells writes that the Owner of the Voice is sitting at a table “reading a manuscript about Utopias”, a document that features a secondary addressee, the Botanist. Within this document, however, the two men are described as taking a walking tour of the Swiss Alps and engaging in a verbal conversation about utopias, during which they are suddenly physically transported to an alternate world. This story-within-a-story describes the two characters as being literally *translated* from their home world of Earth to the parallel planet of utopia, light years away in space:

Out beyond Sirius, far in the deeps of space, beyond the flight of a cannonball flying for a billion years, beyond the range of unaided vision, blazes the star that is *our* Utopia’s sun. ... About it go planets, even as our planets, but weaving a different fate, and in its place among them is Utopia, with its sister mate, the Moon. ... It is so like our planet that a terrestrial botanist might find his every species there, even to the meanest pondweed or the remotest Alpine blossom ... Only when he had gathered that last and turned about to find his inn again, perhaps he would not find his inn! Suppose now the two of us were actually to turn about in just that fashion. ... Suppose that we were indeed so translated even as we stood.⁵⁹

In this passage, the utopia that the Owner envisions is not – at least primarily – the meticulously planned social state that he expands upon throughout *A Modern Utopia*, a world that develops

⁵⁹ *A Modern Utopia* 16.

only after vast periods of time and political restructuring. This utopia is the present human world tweaked ever so slightly, just barely recognizable in its difference. Or, perhaps more accurately, it is the traveler transported perfectly into this new world: a perfect translation of citizens of an unhealthy universe into its healthy counterpart.

At the conclusion of *A Modern Utopia*, Wells again intervenes in the text through his use of italics, describing as from the point of view of a spectator the Owner of the Voice departing on an omnibus into the distant London fog. Wells ends his novel, as he began, not with his characters nor with his ideology, but with a literary justification. Wells anticipates the reaction of his readership, an audience whom he has trained to read *A Modern Utopia* in a certain way since the novel's introduction, yet whom he still believes will harbor certain expectations regarding what a utopian novel *is*, or *should* be.

*But why was he [the Owner of the Voice] intruded? you ask. Why could not a modern Utopia be discussed without this impersonation – impersonally? It has confused the book, you say, made the argument hard to follow, and thrown a quality of insincerity over the whole. Are we but mocking at Utopias, you demand, using all these noble and generalized hopes as the backcloth against which two bickering personalities jar and squabble? ... Nevertheless, I cannot separate these two aspects of human life, each commenting on the other. In that incongruity between the whole and the individual inheres the incompatibility I could not resolve, and which, therefore, I had to present in this conflicting form.*⁶⁰

Wells represents his work as a reflection of the “incompatibility” he perceives between the whole, and individual, present in all of human life. The author perceives the possible complaints against his book – that it is not a real “utopia” – as valid, yet also somewhat missing the point. A traditional utopia would complete itself with “a swelling heart and clear resolves”, a clearly articulated and non-fragmented environment where no contradictions remained.⁶¹ For Wells, however, a true utopia must acknowledge the equally important needs of the individual and mass, and the interplay between stabilizing agreement and creative disagreement. To submerge

⁶⁰ *A Modern Utopia* 246-247.

⁶¹ *A Modern Utopia* 246.

the desires of the individual within an all-consuming mass culture would only lead to the static and uninspiring narratives Wells perceived in the tradition of the utopian novel preceding him.

In *A Modern Utopia*, Wells can be seen as crafting a global narrative in much the same strain as *Anticipations*. While using a novel format, Wells clearly defines the terms of an ideal world state through his primary narrator, the Owner of the Voice, and explores those terms through the physical parameters of his fictional universe and the mental boundaries of his ideological theory. However, Wells' complex narrative structure enables a less dogmatic and more explorative message than offered in *Anticipations*, and highlights the tension between the individual authorial voice, and an ideal global community. Wells creates not only a new form of utopia, but a new literary genre through which he is able to explore his socio-political ideology with greater depth, creativity, and shades of grey. This narrative experiment lays the foundations for the form of *The Shape of Things to Come*, a later novel that combines the rigorous scientific analysis of *Anticipations* with the complex formal mode of *A Modern Utopia* to create a masterpiece in future-bound prophetic fiction.

THE SHAPE OF THINGS TO COME: A Fusion of Theory and Structure

The Shape of Things to Come positions itself in many ways as a serious and thorough examination of a probable course of future human affairs, taking to task the effects of industrialization, world warfare and imperialism on the social and moral welfare of mankind. In many ways, *The Shape of Things to Come* can be viewed as undertaking a more thorough, well-rounded and consistent interrogation of future history than *Anticipations* – in no small part due to its length of over 450 pages, in comparison to *Anticipations*' modest offering of less than 200.⁶² Wells scholar Philip Coupland remarks that “Wells saw *The Shape of Things to Come* as a culmination of a dialectic between theory and events since his writing of *Anticipations* at the turn of the century”.⁶³ Unlike *Anticipations*, however, *The Shape of Things to Come* attempts to craft an entire socio-political narrative from the turn of the 20th century to the beginning of the 22nd, turning its attention not only to the broad effects of technological development but to the minutia that a “history textbook of the future” should contain. From the uprising and downfall of specific real and imagined historical figures, whose lives are tracked through specific dates and world events, to the times, locations, and subject matter of global conferences, Wells prophesizes in *The Shape of Things to Come* with the meticulousness of a social scientist. *Anticipations* limits itself to a vague portrait of what the near future could be, focusing mainly on the logical conclusion of industrialization; *A Modern Utopia* conceives of a parallel and hypothetical world dependent upon the rewriting of the past, the means of which are never truly explained. But *The Shape of Things to Come* achieves both, and more – it exhibits the sociological rigor of *Anticipations* leading to a unified and utopic world state similar to that depicted in *A Modern Utopia*.

⁶² My edition of *Anticipations* is 136 pages; however, it is an oversized print and other editions range in greater page length, thus my ambiguity here.

⁶³ Philip Coupland, “H.G. Wells’ Liberal Fascism”, *Journal of Contemporary History* 35.4 (October 2000) 547.

Wells' social theory is at the heart of *Anticipations*, *A Modern Utopia* and *The Shape of Things to Come*. In each text, Wells describes a narrative of the present and future that advocates for a specific idealization of his socialistic political ideology: the establishment, maintenance and impact of a new world state. In *Anticipations*, this world state is conceived as the "New Republic", a global multiparty governmental system that brings all nationalities together (and ultimately does away with national identities altogether) through mass communication and mass transportation. Wells describes the New Republic as "a Republic that must ultimately become a World State of capable rational men, developing amidst the fading contours and colors of our existing nations and institutions".⁶⁴ In *A Modern Utopia*, the Modern Utopia described by the Owner of the Voice functions as the model for a world state. Although the narrative of *A Modern Utopia* is much more geographically tied – we are told a specific location wherein the plot takes place (the Swiss Alps) and the nationalities of each traveler (British) – the narrative nonetheless reveals key points of information that designate the Modern Utopia itself as operating under the control of a world state. These points include the use of a global currency system, a global system of personal identification through universal papers and identification numbers, and a universally comprehensible language. In *The Shape of Things to Come*, the World State is presented just so, achieved through centuries of war and toil for its cause, culminating in the establishment of a universal language.

In *Shadows of the Future: H.G. Wells, Science Fiction and Prophecy*, Patrick Parrinder remarks that "Wells' identification ... was with the global aims of socialism and science."⁶⁵ Parrinder argues that Wells' self-identification as an "early World-Man" and socialist, combined with his scientific background as a pupil of T. H. Huxley, was at the heart of all of his work

⁶⁴ *Anticipations* 121.

⁶⁵ Parrinder 83.

throughout his literary career, including his science-fiction novels. This background catalyzed not only Wells' belief in the power of a world state, but in the power of science to unite the world into a global community free from war, pestilence, inequality, debt, and the horrors of the modern era. "In labelling himself as an 'early World-Man'," Parrinder writes,

[Wells] was, as so often, using a biological and anthropological metaphor to express the crisis of modern political identity. *Homo sapiens*, the World-Man, was struggling to evolve out of the divided humanity of the era of sovereign nation-states.⁶⁶

Here, Parrinder highlights the biological and anthropological terminology lurking at the heart of Wells' social ideology. Since Wells aspires to a community that is larger than any single nationality, and since his theory is so informed by the physical sciences, it is not surprising that Wells turns to the single common denominator of a global state – the human as *homo sapiens*, a biological species evolving over time. For Wells, the ability for humankind to conceive of a world state, enact processes leading to its achievement, and finally maintain an enduring global community under his exact terms requires a process of intensive social evolution. In each of his texts, Wells points out the failings in humankind at the time of his present era – the early 20th century – and advocates for a future or parallel state where men are mentally and socially evolved enough to accept the conditions of a world state.

In each of Wells' three prophetic texts, the author makes an explicit appeal for the biological and social evolution of humanity. This evolution is directly linked to a process of mass education, made possible through mass communication and transportation; as the world is globalized, so the world's knowledge is shared and made common among all humans. *The Shape of Things to Come* explores this theme with greater depth than either *Anticipations* or *A Modern Utopia*, outlining with specific detail exactly how the impact of the impending Second World War and its political aftermath might lead to a final stage of socio-political enlightenment. It is

⁶⁶ Parrinder 81.

through the blunders of war, the ravages of disease, and the failings of early attempts at global unification that mankind is able to embark upon an effective process of social education and evolution. The biological aspect of this social evolution is visible throughout the text, and in many ways the novel's underlying discourse is humanity's metamorphosis from a "domesticated ape" of 1933, "which has had the intelligence and ability to drag its straw mattress up to the fire when it is cold, but has had neither the wit nor the foresight to escape the consequent blaze", to the educated super-human of the 22nd century who creates and maintains his own portion of the figurative fire.⁶⁷

While the novel's socio-political message is abundantly clear, it is impossible to read *The Shape of Things to Come* without running into the skeleton of its narrative, a narrative that is not only complex in its setup, but consistently draws attention to its construction as a multilayered story. At every turn, Wells seems to undermine the value of his meticulous sociological project by creating a narrative premise and structure that is unreliable and self-referential. Rather than presenting his prophetic future history as a straightforward, nonfictional depiction of his socio-political ideology, Wells intentionally frames his text in terms that are uncertain and fictional. While both *A Modern Utopia* and *The Shape of Things to Come* are planned narratives that self-consciously refer to their creation, the latter goes a step further by literally fragmenting itself through narrative asides and textual interventions. Wells resists the prospect of aligning his linear socio-political narrative of progress with the formal construction of his novel, yet again asserting the dominance of his individual authorial voice. In doing so, Wells implies a need for a truly well-rounded and hybrid literary format that explores the full gambit of textual possibility. Wells pushes for a complex *novel* rather than a rhetorical work of nonfiction such as *Anticipations*,

⁶⁷ *The Shape of Things to Come* 136.

embracing the full range and capabilities of the novel form while embedding his ideology within its pages.

The first of these textual interventions can be seen in the early pages of the text, where “Wells” as narrator begins his project of transcribing the piecemeal documents that comprise Dr. Philip Raven’s dream journals. The second chapter of the first Book (“Book I: Today and Tomorrow”) includes a long passage regarding the limited ability of those living in the world before World War I to conceive of a plausible world state. During this passage, Raven’s text describes a pamphlet – “*The Great Analysis*, dated 1912” – which breaches the concept of a world state “with the utmost timidity, without even an author’s name.”⁶⁸ “Wells” as narrator comments on this in a footnote – the only footnote made throughout the entire novel – with this aside: “Here for once the editor knows better than the writer of the history. This pamphlet was written by William Archer, the dramatic critic, and reprinted under its author’s name with a preface by Gilbert Murray, in 1931. Apparently the book collectors of the years ahead are going to miss this book.”⁶⁹ Here, Wells inserts himself abruptly within the narrative, creating a structural break that not only detracts attention from the flow of Raven’s transcribed dream book, but also undermines its authority; *The Great Analysis* was indeed written by William Archer and reprinted in 1931 under the terms which Wells describes.⁷⁰ Furthermore, *The Great Analysis* is subtitled as “A Plea for Rational World Order” – hardly the “timid” effort that Raven’s dream book describes, at least by Wells’ contemporaneous standards.⁷¹ By inserting a footnote with contemporary, factual citation, Wells is diluting the effect of his own fabricated narrative and making it even more unreliable than its framing has already rendered it. With an ironic edge,

⁶⁸ *The Shape of Things to Come* 29.

⁶⁹ *The Shape of Things to Come* 29.

⁷⁰ Archer, William. “The Great Analysis: A Plea for Rational World-Order,” *Scribner*, University of California, 1912.

⁷¹ Archer.

Wells draws attention to himself as the ultimate authority about and *over* his work, subjugating the story itself to his real-world knowledge and authorial domination.

Wells consistently intervenes in this way throughout the text. Rather than inserting footnotes, however, Wells plays on the “found documents” premise of his narrative and creates asides that highlight his role as editor and compiler. As has been seen earlier, Wells opens *The Shape of Things to Come* with an editorial puzzle: how is he to reconstruct Raven’s fragmented, nonlinear, and shorthand documents into one cohesive narrative? “I found it impossible,” Wells writes,

to make a flowing narrative, altogether of a piece with the opening and closing parts of the history. Some passages came out fairly clear and then would come confusion and obscurity. I have transcribed what I could and written up the intervals when transcription was hopeless.⁷²

Wells first tells his reader about the circumstances surrounding the text’s publication; he then describes the origin of Raven’s raw documents, themselves being transcriptions of the dream book seen in his half-asleep visions. Then, Wells proceeds to describe to his reader the process of molding these raw documents into the books that follow. Each of these, individually, would make for a complex and unreliable narrative with serious implications regarding the function and effect of history-writing. However, Wells does not stop here – he consistently breaks the narrative with meta-textual asides that allude to gaps in the original documents, untranslatable text, and locations in the narrative where Wells has foregone “Raven’s” documents altogether to create his own story:

[*This section was in a detached fascicle, but its place seems to be here. –ED*]⁷³

In our account of the first French revolution and the revolutionary perturbation of the eighteenth century [*No traces of this account are to be found in Raven’s papers. – ED*]⁷⁴

⁷² *The Shape of Things to Come* 19.

⁷³ *The Shape of Things to Come* 198.

⁷⁴ *The Shape of Things to Come* 287.

[*At this point Raven's written transcript breaks off abruptly.*]⁷⁵

What is to be gained by including these explicit asides, that describe holes in the “primary documents” Wells has used to create his text? On a narrative level, these asides allow Wells to perpetuate his framing device while also giving himself a *carte blanche* for any inconsistency, omission, or questionable logic in his story – any of these things may be seen as intentional reflections of the “gaps” in the material he has to work with. Where Wells does not wish to elaborate, he does not have to, and he can create an interesting story without needing to be bogged down by chasing each separate thread for consistency and completeness. However, in addition to giving himself a literary “excuse”, Wells may also be viewed as actively projecting a message through his broken narrative that is several layers removed from its original source. Wells demonstrates through the form and content of *The Shape of Things to Come* that any historical narrative is necessarily planned and constructed out of disparate and nonlinear source material, and that it can never be truly objective or complete. The importance of crafting a global historical narrative within Wells' ideology cannot be understated – and this history, by its very nature, must reinterpret, reconstruct, and skew its sources to accomplish a narrative that can rally the world behind it.

In addition to creating a structurally complex narrative that explicitly interrogates the act of history-making, Wells also draws attention to the importance of the author as an individual creative force behind this process. In Wells' social theory and in his novels, he distinguishes between the “idea creators” and the practical executors of these ideas, arguing that both are necessary for the achievement of a unified world state. Equally important to the educated and trained mass society who is able to understand and execute the necessary steps to global harmony are the individuals, artistic and staunchly non-conformist, who first conceive of the

⁷⁵ *The Shape of Things to Come* 344.

broader concepts which these steps lead to. Wells notes in *The Shape of Things to Come* that no single individual is able to begin and complete a task solely on his own; thus, a multiplicity of humans with a variety of skills are necessary for a healthy environment. “It is a wholesome check upon individual pride,” Wells writes,

that no single man and indeed no single type of man is able both to conceive and carry through the simplest of our social operations. Even the man who cultivates the earth and grows food cannot make the productive implements he uses or select the seeds and plants that yield him increase.⁷⁶

Such a view is not simply contradictory, but in fact champions a variety of modes of existence, including both fiction and nonfiction, science and art, and those who agree with the mentality of the world state with those who do not. *The Shape of Things to Come*, like *A Modern Utopia*, displays a constant tension between Wells’ desire for a homogenous global culture and his need to champion the individual artistic voice – especially his own authorial one. Naturally, then, *The Shape of Things to Come* presents several models of authorship, and several writers. Wells opens the novel with his “colleague” and the writer of its source material, Dr. Philip Raven, whose personal life story is the portal to the future history of the world. Later, Wells also introduces three key figures: Titus Cobbett, Theotocopulous, and De Windt. Finally, Wells presents himself as an author not only of the novel as a whole, but of texts within it as a narrative character. Each of these men is described as pursuing a writing career which ultimately changes the course of world history – at least as Raven’s dream book describes it.

Dr. Philip Raven is described as a diplomat and close acquaintance of Wells, who initially did not like his mannerisms and “foreignness” – a point which is remarkable, given Wells’ insistence upon a harmonious global community. Wells describes Raven as a torn man, whose experiences in lucid dreaming have led him to privately contradict much of his public persona and ideology. Wells writes of Raven:

⁷⁶ *The Shape of Things to Come* 273.

I was, in fact, an outlet for a definite mental exuberance of [Raven's] which it had hitherto distressed him to express. In my presence he could throw off Balliol and the Foreign Office – or, later on, the Secretariat – and let himself go. He could become the Eastern European Cosmopolitan he was by nature and descent. ... My instinctive racial distrust faded before the glowing intensity of his intellectual curiosity. We found we supplemented each other. I had a ready unclouded imagination and he had knowledge. We would go on the speculative spree together.⁷⁷

Here, Wells describes not only a personal camaraderie between his narrative self and Raven, but also a professional synergy that allows for an adventure “on the speculative spree” of “intellectual curiosity”. Raven’s powerful intellect and his pursuit of knowledge is described as formidable, and his reputation in the international community is unmatched. However, Raven’s public sympathies with such organizations as the League of Nations are challenged by his persistent lucid dreams, which seem to completely contradict his outward political beliefs. In the traditional sense, Raven is not a writer but a highly intelligent political figure, who struggles to balance his professional need for rational deliberation and compromise with his independent thirst for knowledge and truth. Notably, however, it is not Raven’s role as public servant that is important to the construction of *The Shape of Things to Come* as a future text. Rather, Raven’s role is important because he acts as a hierophant figure, a medium who is able to read the work of an unknown, future writer across time and space. Raven is important not as a writer, but as a reader – more specifically, as the only person who is uniquely qualified to read the dream book. Ironically, Raven’s dream book is purported to be a common history textbook of the future, accessible and readily understood by all; but for the present world of the novel, Raven is the only one who is privileged to access it. It is Raven’s individual gift to receive the ideas of the future, and translate them into legible notes, which sets the entire narrative into motion.

Titus Cobbett is introduced halfway through the text as the author of a diary chronicling the late 1950s and early 1960s of the dream book’s history. Unlike Raven, De Windt and

⁷⁷ *The Shape of Things to Come* 12.

Theotocopulous, whose public and personal lives are saturated with purposeful socio-political and artistic endeavors that are clearly defined, Titus' diary is simply that – an errant primary document that seems to unconsciously chronicle a tumultuous and incredibly important point in history. The diary itself is described as having been written during a bicycle tour through Europe, but the author of the dream book is unable to provide a specific reason for its authorship:

We have the *Diary of Titus Cobbett* who rode on a bicycle from Rome and along the Riviera to Bordeaux in 1958. He had begun life as an art dealer, and had served the British Inland Revenue for some years as a valuer of furniture, pictures and the like. His tour seems to have been a journey of curiosity. ... He seems to have had some obscure diplomatic or consular function, but of that he is too discreet to speak. Perhaps he was sent to make a report, but if so there is no record of his instructions.⁷⁸

Titus is a significant figure in *The Shape of Things to Come* because while his role is minor and at the fringes of the overall thrust of the historical narrative, like Theotocopulous and Raven, his primary documents become incorporated into the general story. Unlike these other two figures, however, Titus does not present his own political ideas or theories; his work is relevant mainly because it serves to document a period of history that may otherwise have no primary sources.

Wells includes Titus not as a particularly interesting or catalyzing individual in his own right, but as a relatively unremarkable person who was able to capture a very remarkable part of history – a part which is essential in reconstructing the global future narrative that the narrator of the dream book seeks. Later in the novel, Wells reflects upon the importance of sources such as Titus for creating a faithful portrait of history, in contrast to doctored reports commissioned by religious and political rulers of the past. The narrator writes:

It is a growing custom of historians, and we have already followed it freely, to vivify their general statements by quotations from contemporary descriptive writers. As histories have disentangled themselves from their primitive obsession about rulers and their policies, they have made a more and more extensive use of private memoirs, diaries, novels, plays, letters, sketches, pictures and the like.⁷⁹

⁷⁸ *The Shape of Things to Come* 242.

⁷⁹ *The Shape of Things to Come* 382.

In this passage, the narrator champions the individual voices emerging from primary documents as essential to a true and faithful historical portrait. More importantly, however, Wells can be seen as reaffirming the importance of art – *novels*, plays, and literature – in a serious political discussion of the future world. Without these art documents, Wells implies, history is not only incomplete, but fundamentally incorrect.

Theotocopulous, like Titus Cobbett, is an individual whose diaries became the fabric of a later world history. Unlike Titus, however, Theotocopulous is described as a famous and important figure in art, architecture, and social history, whose diary entries served not only as primary documentation, but also as germinating important theoretical concepts. “That gifted painter and designer Ariston Theotocopulous,” Wells writes, wrote in cipher notebooks for thirty-seven years until his death in 2062.⁸⁰ “The bulk of this matter does not concern the student of general history at all,” Wells adds, likening much of Theotocopulous’ writings to that of Titus Cobbett in terms of their content, “and yet it is possible to pick out from it material for a far clearer realization of life under the second Council than could be derived from a score of abstract descriptions.”⁸¹ Theotocopulous is a remarkable figure in *The Shape of Things to Come* because he is one, of very few, who can not only conceive of a future world state, but actually acts on the terms of that state. Not only does he conceive of his own “Plans for a world” in his forty-ninth notebook – plans that include some “brilliant anticipations” and “incredible fantasies” that seem suspiciously anti-biographical – but he creates physical artifacts which continue to exist into the future.⁸² His most famous piece of art, a frieze of elephants, endures despite Theotocopulous’ own resistance to the work and his recognition of a need for a new theory of art:

⁸⁰ *The Shape of Things to Come* 382.

⁸¹ *The Shape of Things to Come* 382.

⁸² *The Shape of Things to Come* 385.

[Theotocopulous] was set to ‘decorate’ an ungainly stretch of wall near Alassio with a frieze of elephants. ... The engineers of the Air Dictatorship were supposed and expected to disregard all thoughts of beauty in what they did. If they made something frightful, then the artist was called in to sugar the pill. There, as in so many things, the restless sensitive mind of Theotocopulous anticipated the ideas of today. ‘Engineers ought to be artists,’ he says, ‘anyhow; and artists ought to be engineers or leave structural work alone.’ This wall of his still exists; his decoration has preserved it, even as he foresaw. It just remains for his sake, a lesson for students and a monument to his still incomparable talent.⁸³

Theotocopulous stands out as one of few individuals who is able to predict, accurately, the necessary course of the future. Ironically, his best-known and still-remaining work is a commission which he did not want to create, knowing that whatever design he might cover the wall with would be inherently disjointed from its structural function. Though Theotocopulous is portrayed as an inherently revolutionary artist and thinker, his most enduring work is a reactionary one. Theotocopulous’ progressive ideas may be viewed as subsumed by a state which is not yet prepared to digest his point of view – and, therefore, the reader may interpret Wells as indicating that the state is not always right, nor always more informed than the individual. Even when a final World State is established and maintained, and all humankind is in harmony with a global system of government and authority, the state is still composed with the thoughts and histories of a thousand individual voices.

A final authorial figure who takes center stage in *The Shape of Things to Come* is Gustave De Windt, whose fictional work, “Social Nucleation”, written in 1942, is purported by the narrator to set the wheels of global unity in motion. Wells as narrator notes that De Windt’s teaching was “a theory of education, extensively it was the assertion of the Modern State. These were inseparable aspects of the same thing.”⁸⁴ Unlike in the cases of Raven, Titus Cobbett and Theotocopulous, De Windt’s personal life is widely passed over in favor of his intensive social theory. De Windt’s work is described as being too progressive for its time, outlining a theory of

⁸³ *The Shape of Things to Come* 385.

⁸⁴ *The Shape of Things to Come* 270.

multiple social nuclei throughout the world, established as hubs through which a central global government might establish control. Wells describes De Windt's work not as inventive, but as bringing together a variety of "obvious" socio-political theories into a workable, practical mass:

It is De Windt's peculiar claim to human gratitude, not that he discovered anything fresh, but that he so built up and fortified the Obvious that not the most subtle and disingenuous mind, nor the biggest fool who ever sentimentalized and spouted, could escape honestly from its inexorable imperatives.⁸⁵

Taken as a collection of authorial types, Raven, Titus Cobbett, Theotocopulous and De Windt may be viewed as representative of the different individual creative minds needed to catalyze and build a collective world history. De Windt is situated at the most extreme end of the intellectual and theoretical spectrum, as the mastermind behind a socio-political theory that ultimately becomes the blueprint for the world state. His private life and artistic compass, by contrast, are limited to none and excluded from the dream book's narrative. Titus Cobbett is at the extreme as an "Everyman" observer, whose diaries unconsciously provide the primary resource for an essential portion of any historical account. Theotocopulous is settled somewhere between these two, a progressive theorist and artist on one hand, while also providing the raw observational data for his own period in time. Finally, Raven holds a privileged position among them all, providing not only his own progressive and complex socio-political theory, but access to a truly revolutionary future – a prophetic future privileged only to him. It is only through access to Raven as individual that the reader is able to view the future history that the textbook of the 22nd century reveals; and, by proxy, the lives and works of Titus Cobbett, Theotocopulous and De Windt.

In *The Shape of Things to Come*, Wells consistently introduces textual interventions and characters who represent different methods of authorship. Although Wells could easily have chosen to have written his "textbook of the future" as a straightforward found document, without

⁸⁵ *The Shape of Things to Come* 273.

intermittent narrative commentary and speculation, Wells chose a more complicated and self-conscious novel for his forward-searching speculations. Significantly, Wells goes even further than introducing *The Shape of Things to Come* through the multilayered degrees of removal of Raven's reconstructed dream book. Adding to this already complex narrative framework, Wells creates a scene in which he discovers Raven's visions due to the publication of a short story, *Brownlow's Newspaper*, that was actually published by Wells in 1932. In *The Shape of Things to Come*, Raven discovers this story and confronts Wells, leading ultimately to Raven's confessions about the dream book seen through his visions:

I made up a short story, *Brownlow's Newspaper*, about a man into whose hands there fell an evening journal of fifty years ahead – and of all the tantalizingly incomplete intimations of a change, such a scrap of the future would be sure to convey. Brownlow, whom I imagined as a cheerful and self-indulgent friend, came home late and rather alcoholic, and found this paper stuck through his letter-slit in the place of his usual *Evening Standard*. He found the print, paper and spelling rather queer; he was surprised by the realism of the coloured illustrations, he missed several familiar features, and he thought the news fantastic stuff, but he was too tired and muzzy to see the thing in its proper proportions, and in the morning when he awoke and thought about it, and realized the marvellous glimpse he had had into the world to come, the paper had vanished for ever down the dust-chute. This story was published in a popular magazine – the *Strand Magazine*, if I remember rightly – and Raven saw it. He wrote to me at once. *You are joking about a serious possibility* (he wrote). *You are making a fairy tale of something that can happen.*⁸⁶

This scene, taken as inspiration from the real-life publication of Wells, adds yet another story to the complex history-weaving of the novel. At every turn, Wells insists on incorporating a new narrative into his story that upsets its linear flow, on one hand, but is also an essential aspect of the continuation of the overall novel. Without the real-life publication of *Brownlow's Newspaper*, Wells would not be able to incorporate this sub-narrative into *The Shape of Things to Come* as an homage to his pre-existing prophetic future discourse; but even more importantly, Wells would not be able to utilize this publication as the catalyst for Raven's dramatic reveal.

⁸⁶ *The Shape of Things to Come* 15.

Had Raven not read *Brownlow's Newspaper*, he may have never confessed to Wells-as-character the experiences that would eventually comprise the novel as a whole. This parallels the activities of all of the in-text authorial figures that the reader has seen, for each is an integral contributor to the overall future history that Wells crafts. Without the primary documents composed by such figures as Titus Cobbett and Theotocopulous, Wells' fictional history would lack the description of essential chronological periods, which are essential to the formation of Wells' global history-making project. Similarly, without the work of De Windt, there would be no catalyst to the plot-level political change described by Wells-as-character. Through the *Brownlow's Newspaper* scene, the reader can view yet another case where a literary document acts as an indispensable catalyst to the plot – and is included in the overall construction of the history as a whole. In this scene, Wells wryly points to himself as the ultimate author and originator of his text, while simultaneously demonstrating that every story – every history – is a compilation of texts from various sources and disparate authors. Although he quests for a universal world history that can reconcile these various authorial voices, Wells is simultaneously resistant of this goal, making every effort to re-introduce aspects of the individual within his narrative of mass communication.

Through an analysis of its complex narrative form, it is clearly shown that *The Shape of Things to Come* does not represent itself as a straightforward, linear, or “black and white” version of the future. As in *A Modern Utopia*, Wells intentionally constructs a future history which prizes individual voices at the same time that it advocates for a global voice and united population. In *The Shape of Things to Come*, however, Wells is able to blend his techniques utilized in *Anticipations* and *A Modern Utopia* to create a text that bridges the gap between fiction and nonfiction, positioning itself as a rigorous analysis while also opening itself to imaginative future spaces. Although Wells' social ideology is at the forefront of his novel, an

integral part of his vision of the future is also the outcome of art and literature. Though Wells may use his novel always as a means towards his social message, he clearly comments on the importance of the individual for generating art, and its role in society. In fact, art is presented in a synchronous relationship with the state of politics and technological development: not only is art essential as a tool for universal communication and education, but a healthy world state begets beautiful art, which in turn makes for a more enjoyable life led by all. As Wells writes,

Things made by mankind under modern conditions are ugly, primarily because our social organization is ugly, because we live in an atmosphere of snatch and uncertainty, and do everything in an underbred strenuous manner. This is the misfortune of machinery, and not its fault. Art, like some beautiful plant, lives on its atmosphere, and when the atmosphere is good it will grow everywhere, and when it is bad nowhere.⁸⁷

In this passage, Wells (through his secondary narrative self) offers a definition of art that is integrally linked to the quality of its surrounding environment. For Wells, the flourishing of beautiful art becomes the sign of a healthy social system; it indicates that individuals are not being suppressed, but rather operating in tandem.

Although various aspects of *The Shape of Things to Come* have been analyzed that complicate its structure and content, and point to its self-conscious nature, the fact remains that this novel spends the majority of its pages arguing every detail of Wells' socio-political ideology put into motion. Like *Anticipations* and *A Modern Utopia*, *The Shape of Things to Come* offers a reading of current affairs that quickly turns into a rigorous analysis of both fictional and nonfictional developments in politics, technology, warfare, religion, and a variety of social spheres and systems. While *The Shape of Things to Come* covers greater detail and a longer chronological period, it presents a similar core message, refined over time but ideologically linked to Wells' earlier works. Throughout the novel, Wells outlines a modern period of darkness during which the world is dominated by nation-states continuously at war; a period of global war

⁸⁷ *The Shape of Things to Come* 79.

and nuclear destruction; plagues of pestilence sweeping through the world; and the multiplicity of flawed attempts finally culminating in an effective world state. This winding and frustrating process towards global unification is described by Wells, as with his earlier works, as a biological process of evolution. His primary metaphor for the development of a world state is the evolution of a human brain, described in Book I:

We are still enlarging this Brain of Mankind, still increasing its cells, extending its records and making its interactions more rapid and effective. A vast independent literature flourishes beside it. Compared with today, our species in the Age of Frustration was as a whole brainless; it was collectively invertebrate with a few scattered ill-connected ganglia; it was lethargically ignorant; it had still to develop beyond the crude rudiments of any coordinated knowledge at all.⁸⁸

To develop beyond this conglomeration of “ill-connected ganglia”, the human population would need to be educated, organized, motivated into action, and – perhaps most importantly – weeded of those classes who were holding back and “poisoning” the brain of society. As with his two earlier texts, Wells proposes in *The Shape of Things to Come* a process of “social surgery” which is advocated as necessary for the development of an ideal global population. During the First Conference at Basra in Wells’ fictional 1965, the narrator observes that conference members considered this social surgery as a necessary obstacle to any proceedings toward an ideal future.

The Conference was lucidly aware that upon the same planet at the same time you cannot have both an aviator and a starveling breeding peasantry, toiling endlessly and forever in debt. One or other has to go, and the fundamental objective of the Conference was to make the world safe for the former. The disappearance of the latter followed, not as a sought-after end but as a necessary consequence. And the disappearance of as much of the institutions of the past were interwoven with it.⁸⁹

The future history that Wells presents in *The Shape of Things to Come*, however coloured by his multilayered narrative mode, remains a painfully one-sided theory of social progress that exterminates, “necessarily”, masses of people who cannot contribute within a world state. While Wells’ social theory upholds the need for mass communication and education, it does not extend

⁸⁸ *The Shape of Things to Come* 143.

⁸⁹ *The Shape of Things to Come* 297.

the right to communication to all of the world's membership. Those who cannot be conveniently raised to the standards of the new world state are quietly erased, leaving only Wells' ideal global citizens – who, conveniently, have the same attributes as his ideal readers.

Critic Peter Kemp argues that Wells' overpowering social theory obscures all avenues to alternate interpretations of the world or future. Kemp writes:

The Shape of Things to Come affirms that 'there can only be one right way of looking at the world for a normal human being'. The citizenry of utopia assemble in obedient phalanxes behind this belief. This regimentation, Wells likes to imply, has evolved quite naturally. But, from time to time, remarks are dropped which show that a fairly fearsome weeding-process has occurred.⁹⁰

Kemp points to Wells' systematic extermination of entire social classes in *The Shape of Things to Come* (and his earlier works) as definitive proof that the author believes in only "one right way of looking at the world". However, there is an important distinction between believing in only one right way of looking at the world, and one necessary way of achieving a livable future. Although Wells does insist upon means to his world state that are harsh at best, and deplorable at worst, he does not glorify them in *The Shape of Things to Come* as he did in *Anticipations*. Instead of viewing the extermination of those "unfit" for the future as a "noble" act, Wells presents it as a grave but necessary reality, as he does world war, disease, famine, and economic collapse. Wells' bleak means to a brighter future may be presented as the only option, but they are shown to be interpretable in a variety of ways – by the characters within the text, and by Wells himself.

The Shape of Things to Come is the culmination of a newly self-conscious, future-seeking mode of historical writing that Wells began in his landmark work, *Anticipations*. Rather than justifying its form to the reader, it boldly embarks on a dizzyingly non-linear and multi-layered narrative that challenges not only the traditional notion of historical narrative, but also the

⁹⁰ Peter Kemp, *H.G. Wells and the Culminating Ape* (London: The Macmillan Press Ltd, 1982) 210.

traditional novel form. Wells is able to incorporate his social ideology, scientific background, artistic innovation, and literary theory into *The Shape of Things to Come* in equal measure, and in this sense succeeds in developing a genre that allows him to create a serious yet inventive discourse. However, Wells retains the conflict between individual and mass culture that he struggles with through *Anticipations* and *A Modern Utopia*. While he advocates for a harmonious balance between the two through his portrayals of individual intellects and executive groups, Wells is ultimately unable to provide an explicit answer that can effectively balance these competing sensibilities.

CONCLUSION: Implications on H.G. Wells as Author, His Legacy, and the Future

It has been demonstrated so far that in *Anticipations, A Modern Utopia* and *The Shape of Things to Come*, Wells focuses his attention on at least two major challenges. Firstly, he aspires to craft a vision of the future that is logically resonant with the shape of his contemporary environment, while also conforming to his socio-political ideology. This ideology advocates for the erasure of national boundaries and the construction of a world state which promotes universal education, a common language and system of communication, and technological advancement – all of which made possible through a planned process of systematic social evolution. Secondly, Wells attempts to locate and create the best literary structure and mode that will give him the platform he needs for both practical, fact-based discussion and imaginative, speculative reflection. In describing these two goals of Wells, it becomes clear that the two are mutually dependent. Wells promotes an ideology that prizes literature and art and as indispensable facets of a truly successful world state: a universal language, a global history, and comprehensive education and communication are among the most important of Wells' predictions in his own terms. At the same time, Wells' quest for the ideal mode of literature to express his ideology runs parallel to his advocacy for a global history. At surface level, Wells seems to invest himself in the very project of creating a global future history that necessarily requires both scientific rigor and fictional imagination to create an effective narrative.

An overview of Wells' theory of literature, as expressed in his nonfiction essays and correspondence with Henry James, strengthens this view. James, an American realist who spent the majority of his career in Britain and became a mentor to many aspiring writers, met Wells in 1898, when James was 55 and Wells was 32 years old.⁹¹ Over the course of several years, the

⁹¹ Edel and Ray 15.

two authors engaged in a wide variety of correspondence, much of it describing and debating the men's opposing points of view regarding the function of literature. As Leon Edel and Gordon Ray note in their introduction to *Henry James and H.G. Wells: A Record of their Friendship, their Debate on the Art of Fiction, and their Quarrel*,

Wells and [George Bernard] Shaw, as socialists, believed in '*la littérature engagée*', a useable, functional art appropriate to the new world they wished to fashion out of the old. James wanted art to be neither consciously prophetic nor self-consciously didactic.⁹²

Over the course of their literary relationship, though appreciative of each other's works, James and Wells consistently disagreed about the fundamental reason for writing. "To you," Wells writes to James in a letter dated 1915, "literature like painting is an end, to me literature like architecture is a means, it has a use."⁹³ For Wells, the marriage of literature with a practical function was essential for its meaning as a work of art, while it was enough for James for the artistic effort to speak for itself. It is no accident that Wells compared his conception of the function of literature with architecture. To be an architect is to be the ultimate fusion of artist and engineer, a combination that Wells believes will be imbued in each member of his ideal world state. In *A Modern Utopia*, the Owner of the Voice expresses this sentiment quite explicitly:

How will a great city of Utopia strike us? To answer that question well one needs be artist and engineer, and I am neither. Moreover, one must employ words and phrases that do not exist, for this world still does not dream of the things that may be done with thought and steel, when the engineer is sufficiently educated to be an artist, and the artistic intelligence has been quickened to the accomplishment of an engineer.⁹⁴

For Wells, literature without a greater purpose lacked fundamental value. Although Wells prized artistic experimentation and efforts to craft a more beautiful and engaging narrative – as can be noted in *A Modern Utopia* and *The Shape of Things to Come*, both expressing complex forms and employing a high level of imagination – he ultimately championed them only when working

⁹² Edel and Ray 11.

⁹³ Edel and Ray 264.

⁹⁴ *A Modern Utopia* 163.

in concert with the natural and social sciences. “The essential difference between [Wells and James] lay,” write Edel and Ray,

in the fact that Wells’ scientific training, combined with his need for self-assertion, made him an exponent of a materialistic kind of artistry to which to which James was utterly opposed. ... Wells could not for long accept beauty and art as ends in themselves.⁹⁵

Ultimately, the two men’s opposing views lead to their falling out, of which Wells was the key instigator. Their correspondence and its accompanying literature of critical response reveals that Wells’ advocacy for a *useful* literature was not restricted to the content of his fictional novels, but was the founding principle behind his role as an author.

In “H.G. Wells: Utopia and Doomsday,” Frank McConnell argues that Wells’ insistence on a greater purpose for fiction can be traced to his experiences as a lower-middle class draper’s apprentice, who was able to find escape from his uninteresting fate through reading and education. Born to a shopkeeper father and a domestic servant mother, Wells was trained from a young age to seek apprenticeship to supplement his family income.⁹⁶ It was through his appetite for literature that Wells was eventually able to leave his career as a draper and eventually win a scholarship to the Normal School of Science, where he studied biology under Thomas Henry Huxley.⁹⁷ Between his personal experiences and the social evolutionary theory he absorbed from Huxley, Wells formulated an opinion of the value of literature that rose beyond enjoyment or artistic beauty. “[Wells’] books,” McConnell asserts,

served as his public struggles against [his] despondency. Science fiction and realistic fiction, history, economic and political analysis – all offered Wells potential ways out of the trap, as he saw it, that evolutionary history had laid for man. ... Ideas mattered, and mattered passionately, to [Wells] because he believed they were the only things that might save the human race from extinction. But the

⁹⁵ Edel and Ray 18.

⁹⁶ Frank D. McConnell, “H.G. Wells: Utopia and Doomsday”, *Wilson Quarterly* 4.3 (Summer 1980) 181.

⁹⁷ McConnell 181.

comfortable niches in which we store our ideas – ‘science’, ‘aesthetics’, ‘economics’, ‘sociology’ – had to go.⁹⁸

McConnell’s argument is strengthened through a close reading of *Anticipations, A Modern*

Utopia and *The Shape of Things to Come*, three texts which are primarily interested not in their aesthetic beauty, but in their role in presenting a greater social message. Only with the aid of the right literary form, combining the inventiveness of art with a logical utility, could these messages and ideas blossom into tangible realities.

From a close examination of these three texts, it is clear that Wells values the ability of mankind to grow and evolve, to absorb new ideas and to thereby become educated enough to implement these ideas practically in the world. The advocacy of such a project of social evolution, and the articulation of the role of literature as an educating tool, are the major goals of Wells’ prophetic future work. The stakes of Wells’ project are, in his own terms and those of his critics, life or death – the difference between the extermination of the human race and its development into a synchronous, global society. However, this process of social evolution – of creating the ideal global citizen and the ideal reader – involves an equally important process of casting off those who cannot adapt to the new standards of knowledge and skills that a world state requires. It requires, in essence, a leveling of all of humanity into one even plane, creating an evenly educated social class whose individuals differ only in degree.

Despite this project, which appears to advocate for the homogenization of humanity, Wells’ experiments in prophetic future texts demonstrate an unwillingness to reject the individual voice. Wells’ adventures into hybrid literary forms blending fact and fiction and distorting any straightforward narrative voice consistently remind the reader that every history, even a unified history of the future world state, is necessarily composed of a myriad of disparate voices, sources, and experiences. While *Anticipations* lays the groundwork for Wells’ socio-

⁹⁸ McConnell 178.

political ideology and his struggle to accurately express it through literature, *A Modern Utopia* and *The Shape of Things to Come* are more complex projects. Both novels bring a vision of global unity and mass understanding to the forefront of their plots, while simultaneously enacting structural forms that refuse to adapt to a universal model of history-making. Both novels also assert the need for art and literature as crucial elements of both the content and structure of history – without allowing for a multilayered dialogue of individual artistic voices, any telling of history is fundamentally incorrect. Wells' attempt to preserve the individual while uniting all members of the globe is perhaps his real utopic project – for, in doing so successfully, Wells would be able to create the ultimate future history and justify the meaning of art itself. To achieve such a goal would be to simultaneously perfect the hybrid literary form which Wells seeks through his various experiments. If Wells falls short in this ultimate challenge, the writer can only commend him for opening an invaluable dialogue about the relationship between the meaning of art and societal progress. In a 21st century world where technology continues to dictate the social formations of the world, Wells' struggles to situate the role of the artist and historian prove enduringly relevant – and remain unsolved.

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