

## JULES VERNE AND H.G. WELLS

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The fact that both Wells and Verne dealt excessively with the march of machinery in their literary outputs often leads to a fallacy, to the fallacy of Wells being seen as a second Verne, Oscar Wilde, for example, calling him the 'English Verne'. In fact, because there are more differences than similarities between the two writers, both disliked the idea of being considered as the twin founding fathers of Sciencefiction<sup>1</sup>. And ironically, each was too enthusiastic to disassociate himself from the other in his own way. In an interview, for instance, the French writer complained that he did not see the possibility of comparison between his (Wells's) work and mine. We do not proceed in the same manner. It occurs to me that his stories do not repose on any scientific bases... I make use of physics. He invents. I go to the moon in a cannon-ball discharged from a cannon. Here there is no invention. He goes to Mars in an airship, which he constructs of a metal which does away with the law of gravitation. *Ça Cest tres joli...* but show me this metal'.<sup>1</sup> As is inherent in Verne's statement, Verne's purpose was to discover what marvels were hidden in the storehouse of science. But as Verne points out, this was not Wells's primary purpose. Yet, before we further this point, we must, in justice to Wells, underline the fact that Wells, as a writer with a scientific education, was not totally disinterested in finding plausible answers to questions similar to those that preoccupied Verne. Wells probed whether it was possible for man to cross the Continents in a balloon, or whether it was possible for man to discover the Poles. In 'The Newly Discovered Element' (1895), for example, Wells contended that people had been breathing argon without knowing it. In 'The Transit of Mercury' (1894) he wrote that there were many issues worth knowing about Mercury as it orbited the Sun. In his essays on the Moon he dealt with the possibility of life on other planets while praising other philosophers', such as J.F. Nisbet's 'perpetual quest of the unassailable truths of being'<sup>2</sup>.

1. Robert Sherard, Jules Verne Interviewed, *T.P.'s Weekly*, 2 (9 Ekim, 1903), s. 589.

2. H. G. Wells, "J. F. Nisbet" *Academy*, 56 (6 Mayıs, 1899), s. 502-504. Diğer bazı örnekler: *Visibility of Change in the Moon, Intelligence on Mars*,

These and several other similar examples may suffice to show that Wells on occasions was as scientific as Verne and was not indifferent to scientific discoveries. In fact, as he made it clear in 'The Strangeness of Argon', (1895) he would welcome any new contribution to science or any exploration. 'Surely there are still wonders left in the world', he wrote, 'and the hearty discoverer may keep a good heart yet though Africa be explored'<sup>3</sup>. Thus Wells was ready to glorify any 'hearty discoverer' but he had no intention himself to assume the role of a scientific discoverer, or to be the patent holder of a technological innovation. Instead, his aim was to make guesses or suggestions about man's place in the universe in the future, and most often technology was used as the agent that enabled him to probe into man's future. His invention of a time machine, for example, was not to prove that man could ever create such a piece of technology but to provide himself with a fictional device as a means of exploring what lay ahead. Even when he promoted gadgets as per se, his sole purpose was to show his readers a better way of living, to prove that the new conditions physical science brought about, not only dispensed man as a source of energy, but supplied the hope that all routine work could be made automatic, that there would be no need for anyone to toil habitually. In other words, he was not concerned with technicalities, and he sketched his inventions briefly. Even then he was much freer with the laws of nature.

Admittedly, in some of his earlier fantasies, the biological and physical sciences constitute the major themes as in *The Island of Doctor Moreau* where experiments are undertaken to make human beings out of animals. Again, *The Food of the Gods* deals with the possibility of stimulating growth by a sort of chemical 'Herakleorpha'. Yet, even in such works his primary concern was not to demonstrate that modern science could work such miracles, but rather to show that science could be abused if used unwisely by people with selfish pursuits.

Again, in his novel of ideas where he viewed science more positively and optimistically, his approach was similar to that of Huxley's, not Verne's. Huxley, like all the other followers of Darwin such as John Tyndall, or Winwood Reade, had argued that if man used science intelligently and for the greater glory of the human race, then science could be his benefactor saving him from utter despair. In *Tono-Bungay*, for instance, Ponderevo proclaims that if one 'win to her (science) she

3. H. G. Wells, «The Strangeness of Argon" *Pall Mall Gazette*, 60 (15 Mart, 1895), s. 3.

will not fail you; she is yours and mankind's for ever... (Science) is reality, the one reality that I have found in this strange disorder of existence ... things grow under your hands when you serve her, tilings that are permanent in the whole life of man'<sup>4</sup>. Ponderevo's comments as Wells's spokesman shed light to the fact that when Wells gave precedence to science his emphasis was on its value to man in terms of positive knowledge and educational aims. So, well aware that his purpose was not similar to that of Verne's, Wells too felt the need to disassociate himself from Verne. 'There is no literary resemblance whatever between the anticipatory inventions of the great Frenchman and these fantasies', he proclaimed. 'His work dealt almost always with actual possibilities of invention and discovery, and he made some remarkable forecasts. The interest he evoked was a practical one; he wrote and believed and told that this or that thing could be done... (He) helped his readers to imagine it done and reahse what fun, excitement, or mischief would ensue. Most of this inventions have "come true". But these stories of mine do not pretend to deal with possible things; they are exercises of the imagination in a quite different field'<sup>5</sup>.

As Wells's comment sums up, there were at least two fundamental differences between Wells's scientific romances and Verne's scientific fantasies. First, as mentioned earlier, Verne was interested in the actual possibilities of science. Consequently, as Wells also points out, most of Verne's stories established their reputation mainly for the materialisation of their technical predictions. Today moon travel is a part of human achievement and submarine can explore the depths of the oceans. Most of Wells's scientific imaginings, on the other hand, have not come true. No one has yet been able to build a machine to travel in time; no one has yet been able to discover the formula of invisibility. Yet, in justice to Wells, one should also note that not all of his scientific forecasts remain as fantasy. In 1898, for instance, in *When the Sleeper Wakes*, he had foreseen the potentialities of aeroplane as a military weapon, and in his later books chemical weapons were abundantly used. Again, for instance, man has discovered chemicals which stimulate growth, something which Wells had already considered in the early 1900s. Yet far more significant than this is the fact that some of his scientific ideas have inspired eminent scientists of the twentieth century. Leo Szilard,

4. H. G. Wells, *Tono Bungay*, (New York, 1953) s. 203, 398.

5. N. and J. Mackenzie, *The Time Traveller, The Life of H. G. Wells*, (Londra, 1973), s. 117.

for instance, acknowledged an indebtedness to Wells: 'In 1932.. I read a book by H.G. Wells... *The World Set Free*... and in it H.G. Wells describes the discovery of artificial radioactivity and puts it in the year 1933, the year in which it actually occurred. He then proceeds to describe the liberation of atomic energy on a large scale for industrial purposes, the development of atomic bombs, and a world war... He places this war in the year 1956, and in this war the major cities of the world are all destroyed by atomic bombs'. Szilard then adds that 'this book made a great impression on me, but I didn't regard it as anything *but* fiction. It didn't start me thinking whether or not such things could in fact happen. I had not been working in nuclear physics up to that time'. And when Szilard realised how a chain nuclear reaction could be set, up, he applied for a patent to cover his invention. Yet, at the same time he did not forget to pay tribute to Wells: 'I knew it because I had read H.G. Wells — I did not want this patent to become public'<sup>6</sup> Indeed, as Szilard acknowledgement reveals, one of Wells's most remarkable prophecies was that of the atomic warfare in *The World Set Free*, a social and scientific fantasy written just before the outbreak of the First World War. In depicting this man made catastrophe Wells was originally inspired by Soddy's *Interpretation of Radium*. Yet in 1913 the atom had not been split.-Again, in the novel the Wellsian scientists discover a substance called 'carolinum' which has the characteristics and uses of plutonium, an element which was isolated much later, and which, when combined with uranium, produces atomic fuel.

As Szilard statement indicates Wells's early scientific romances, and Utopias and sociological novels produced after the turn of the century were valued for the truthfulness of their social and political forecasts. This very fact clearly points out that Wells's literary output has various complex implications which can be interpreted on many different levels and it was this aspect of Wellsian fantasies that differentiate them from Verne's imaginative writing. As Arnold Bennett, the first major writer who demurred from the conviction that Wells had progressed along Verne lines, wrote, Verne's preoccupation with machinery and his stockpiling of important facts lacked the philosophical and sociological base of Wells's works. Wells's fiction, particularly his early fantasies such as *The Time Machine*, are rich in philosophical suggestions and symbolism, the significance of which, at some extent at least, is

6. Leo Szilard, "Reminiscences", in *Perspectives in American History* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1968) II. S. 99, 102.

universal. For example, the heroes of his scientific romances, Moreau, Griffin, and, in a lesser degree, Ostrog, stand for the general human tendency towards gaining absolute power for which history offers countless examples. Again, Moreau and Griffin are the embodiment of human beastliness and the desire to hunt that characterises even the most civilised man. Wells's romances credited for their historical significance bear remarkable relevance to our modern civilisation as they entail some of the most distinctive aspects of modern times. They contain some of the most predominant preoccupations of the *fin de siècle* and it was some of these elements that marked the birth and development of several basic moral assumptions and issues that closely concern mid-twentieth century man. Griffin and Moreau, for instance, stand for the abuse of science and the ill results, disasters that it leads to. Moreau, in particular, with his amoral experiments on living flesh seems to be anticipatory of the scientific experiments carried out on human beings in the concentration camps of the twentieth century. Ostrog, the Wellisian overman, on the other hand, is an anticipation of the European fascist leaders of the 1920s and 1930s, or at least of the beraking towards realism in political science in the mid thirties. Furthermore, Wells's romances, unlike Verne's are rich in, archetypal imagery, most explicit in *The Time Machine* with its division between the heavenly and the demonic imagery seeming to symbolize the clash between the conscious and the increasingly menacing unconsciousness. In *The Island of Doctor Moreau*, Moreau is a manifestation of super ego that is eventually absorbed by the dark and primitive forces that he himself was trying to control and conquer.

These instances the number of which can be increased are suffice to show that there is a marked difference between Wells and Verne as far as the purpose and the content of their works are concerned. In brief, as one of Wells's critics wrote, when comparing the two writers one discerns that, 'Jules Verne (is) not enough. Starting from the same point of view (of) science and imagination — Wells seems to write rather more for grown-ups, and hence his superiority; not in that he aspires to this, but in the fact that he succeeds. Jules Verne wanted to but could not manage it', The critic then continues to compare he inventive gifts of both writers and concludes by asserting that 'Those of Wells must be richer and rarer- undoubtedly. But I hold that it is as a philosopher, and even as a psychologist, that one principally sees him. Whether he puts his earthly heroes on and even in the moon, or in the intan-

gible dimensions of time, he allows them to retain a body, a soul, and a mind; he imagines what a man may become in these fictitious circumstances and fancied atmospheres, and sometimes he gives us the precise sensation of it. The interest moves continually from the external to the internal; this is the source of drama and irony, and also of the Swiftian satirical intention of certain descriptive passages, deliberately strange and calculated in their absurdity'. His comparison of Wells to Nietzsche is crucial as it sums up the essence of the difference between the so called 'twin fathers of science fiction': 'Starting out from the good Jules Verne, are we now very far from the terrible Nietzsche?'<sup>7</sup>. In Wells, particularly in his early romances and as far as certain aspects of his Utopias, such as the concept of 'superman' (Übermensch) are concerned, we definitely are not very far from the German philosopher. Thus, while Verne's stories, as one of the critics commented, are 'simple yarns of entertainment that appeal to man's infancy and are too infantile to be reread in (adulthood)'<sup>8</sup> 'Wells's scientific stories are, in Edward Shanks's words 'in their degree, myths'. Indeed, his fantasies, using his own words, were experiments in, a quite different world', something in the romancer same vein with the symbolic romances of Hawthorne or Melville which found its most recent voice in the works of Golding.

7. Henri Ghoben, *Review of The First Men in the Moon*, 23. *Varmitage*, (Aralık, 1901), s. 471-472.

8. Henri Ghoben, s. 471.