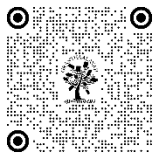


# A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF H G WELLS' *ANTICIPATIONS* IN EXPLORING THE MECHANISM OF FUTURISTIC PREDICTIONS

Bijesh V Jose <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Assistant Professor in English, Maharaja's College, Ernakulam, Kerala- 682011



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## ABSTRACT

The ambiguity surrounding what lies ahead is precisely what draws human beings to prognostications of the future, which may not be explicable through rational principles. Occasionally, Futuristic predictions have an equitably likely chance of being either accurate or inaccurate. However, the exact predictions can inspire a sense of awe within the human psyche. Despite the seemingly low prior probability of many such events occurring, they nonetheless transpire. The mere difficulty in comprehending the causal mechanisms behind such occurrences does not render them nonexistent. Out of all the literary luminaries in the English language, Herbert George Wells stands out for his remarkable ability to astound the global populace with his visionary predictions that have materialized with remarkable and startling accuracy. Wells' unparalleled ability to predict the future is most prominently showcased in his seminal work, *Anticipations* (1901) which demonstrate his mastery of political realism and uncanny prophetic insight. A scrutiny of *Anticipations* is made to explore the compendium of futuristic predictions in it.

**Keywords:** Futurism, Science, Literature, Humanism

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Literature and future are intertwined by a philosophical perspective that acknowledges the significance of creativity and human free will in shaping the trajectory of happenings. Predictions in literature are frequently employed as a mechanism to scrutinize conceivable futures and the ramifications of specific actions or occurrences. Regardless of whether it falls under the domain of science fiction or other genres, such projections can operate as cautionary tales or an inspiration of change. Herbert George Wells stands out for his remarkable ability to astound the global populace with his visionary predictions that have materialized with remarkable and startling accuracy. In 1895, Wells published his debut novel *The Time machine*, which presented a bleak portrayal of humanity's future and can be categorized as a work of dystopian literature. Wells' unparalleled ability to predict the future is most prominently showcased in his two seminal works, *Anticipations* (1901) and *The World Set Free* (1914), both of which demonstrate his mastery of political realism and uncanny prophetic insight. A scrutiny of *Anticipations* is made to explore the compendium of futuristic predictions in it.

*Anticipations*, the abbreviated title of Wells' second non-fiction work, *Anticipations of the Reaction of Mechanical and Scientific Progress Upon Human Life and Thought*, represents his visionary forecasts of the intellectual advancement

of humanity from 1901 up to the turn of the millennium in the year 2000. Wells posited that the world was rapidly transforming due to the influence of industrialization and technological advancements. He postulated the emergence of automobiles, buses and trucks and the deployment of aircrafts for military purposes. Furthermore, he argued that the future would be shaped by competition between nations, the struggle for resources, a decline in traditional marriage structure and a waning of Christian influence in society. Upon reflection of the annals of the history and a diligent examination of current global events, ample evidence abounds attesting to the accuracy of astute prophecies. The Wright Brothers' inaugural flight in 1903, Henry Ford's creation of the Model T automobile in 1908 and the advent of industrial automation brought about by the CNC machine and PLC product in the mid-twentieth century and geopolitical conflicts over strategic resources such as the gulf war are concrete examples of how Wells' visionary foresight was not a mere abstraction, but rather a testament to his profound prescience.

Herbert George Wells, a prolific writer and a prophet of optimism, held a significant position in awakening human intellect and highlighting impending perils, such as escalating social tensions and potential astronomical calamities. Through his literary efforts, particularly in his work *Anticipations of the Reaction of Mechanical and Scientific Progress upon Human Life and Thought*, Wells proposed for a framework for global governance structured devoid of a tumultuous history of uprisings. His keen interest in scientific and technological innovations as well as his involvement in the contemporary political development is most evident in this work of non-fiction. A significant proportion of the forecasts made in the work have remarkably materialized, and it continues to be recognized as one of the most exemplary demonstration of Wells' clairvoyance.

In its brevity and unambiguous nature, the preface of *Anticipation* adequately serves to encapsulate the intension and futurological speculation of Wells. 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. (Wells, *Anticipation* 1)

At the outset of his predictions, Wells offers commentary on the trajectory of individual and public transportation, forecasting a future in which these modes of transit will evolve and advance to offer enhanced speeds and convenience, thereby facilitating the growth and expansion of urban areas. "In the next place, and parallel with the motor truck, there will develop the hired or privately owned motor carriage. This, for all except the longest journeys, will add a fine sense of personal independence to all the small conveniences of first- class railway travel" (1). The veracity of this statement has been substantiated in all of its facets. In the years following the publication of *Anticipations* in 1901, the automobile industry experienced rapid growth and development. Mass production techniques, pioneered by companies such as Ford Motor Company, made cars more affordable and accessible to a wider range of customers. As a result, privately owned motor carriages become increasingly common.

By the 1920s and 1930s, the rise of the automobile had a significant impact on American society and culture. "The automobile has not merely taken over the street, it has become dissolved the living tissues of the city. Its appetite for space is absolutely insatiable; moving and parked, it devours urban land." (Mencken 270). The rationale is none other than which Wells has succinctly expounded: "One will be free to dine where one chooses, hurry when one chooses, travel asleep or awake, stop and pick flowers, turn over in bed of a morning and tell the carriage to wait" (Wells, *Anticipations* 15). The ownership of an automobile metamorphosed into a representation of individual liberty and mobility, enabling people to travel with greater ease and autonomy than had previously been possible. Thus, the "fairly safe prophesying" (16) of Wells materialized in its entirety, as events unfolded in exact accordance with his foresight.

Wells was resolute in his assertion that the acceleration of terrestrial transportation has fundamentally transformed human civilization and the rise of sprawling metropolises is an imperative occurrence. As such, the conventional dichotomy between "town" and "country" has become antiquated as a novel type of "Urban region" emerged. At the turn of the century, a large proportion of European nations were primarily rural in character, with the preponderance of the populace dwelling within modest, agrarian-centred settlements and farming collectives. There was a prevailing belief among many people that rural settlements would remain steadfast and resistant to change in the face of the growing forces of urbanization. This perspective is reflected in various literary works from that period, as evidenced by the following quote: "the village still had a soul. It was not yet the mere dormitory of a commercial town or an industrial centre. It had not yet been weakened by the currents that would break it up, isolate it, and turn it into a mere physical and social entity" (Rolland 10).

In opposition to the aforementioned perspective, Wells elucidated his prediction that the destiny of rural communities would bear a resemblance to that of urban centres in the years to come. And as for the world beyond our urban regions? The same line of reasoning that leads to the expectation that the city will diffuse itself until it has taken up considerable areas and many of the characteristics, the greenness, the fresh air, of what is now country, leads us to suppose also that the country will take to itself many of the qualities of the city. (Wells, *Anticipations* 63)

This perspective has unequivocally materialized and a reasonable glance at history bears witness to its veracity. New York City was originally a small Dutch settlement called New Amsterdam. It grew into a major city due to its location as a major port and centre of commerce. Today, it is one of the largest cities in the United States and a global centre of finance and culture. Correspondingly, Shanghai was once a small fishing village but grew rapidly in the mid-twentieth century due to its location as a major port city. Today, it is the largest city in China and one of the largest in the world, with a population of over 24 million people. In a comparable manner, Wells prognosticated that the United States of America would ascend to the status of global super power, as they are “the social mass which has perhaps advanced furthest along the new lines” (101).

Regarding his conjecture on the topic of warfare, Wells anticipated that future conflicts would involve an array of intricate machines and would deviate significantly from traditional warfare practices. Subsequently, he affirms that “the revolution that is in progress from the old war to a new war, different in its entire nature from the old, is marked primarily by the steady progress in range and efficiency of the rifle and of the field gun-and more particularly of the rifle” (178). The level of authenticity in his viewpoint is quite significant, as Rifles are a versatile tool in the modern day warfare, serving various purposes such as long-range engagement, suppression fire, assault, marksmanship, sniping, support fire and defence.

Wells also inferred the prospect of utilizing flying machines in combat: “there will be a vast and rapid shifting to and fro of big and very long range guns. These guns will probably be fought with the help of balloons” (182). Flying machines have played a crucial role in modern warfare, both as reconnaissance and attack platforms. Military aviation dates back to the mid-twentieth century, with the invention of airplanes and the development of air power doctrine. Nowadays, Bombers and attack aircraft are used to strike ground targets, while transport aircraft are used to move troops and supplies to and from the battlefield. The premonition posited by Wells’ that “It will be evident that such warfare as this inevitable precision of gun and rifle forces upon humanity, will become less and less dramatic as a whole, more and more as a whole a monstrous thrust and pressure of people against people” (183) has proven to be accurate. The aftermath of the two world wars was marked by an exceedingly atrocious and appalling outcome. The experience of disillusionment engendered a sense of terror, prompting individuals to engage in contemplative reflection that “this is the way the world ends. Not with a bang but a whimper” (Eliot 76).

The anticipations put forth by Wells with respect to the impending socio-political sphere are noteworthy and indicative of his own political stance. “He suggests the emergence of transnational power blocks, including a “Federal Europe” moving towards a “New republic” dominating the world” (Partington 521). Wells envisioned that within the newly established republic, individuals would shed their doctrinal views on matters of religion and attain a state of transcendence beyond the concept of a higher power.

They will have no positive definition of God at all. They will certainly not indulge in “that something, not our selves that makes for righteousness (not defined) or any defective claptrap of that sort. They will content themselves with denying the self- contradictory absurdities of an obstinately anthropomorphic theology” (Wells, *Anticipations* 282).

The twentieth century witnessed a profound transformation in religious adherence, as traditional forms of religion faced unprecedented challenges and alternative spiritual practices emerged. Scientific and rational thinking, fuelled by advancements in technology, eroded the authority of traditional religious beliefs and practices. This was amplified by major historical events, such as the devastating World Wars, which led to question the relevance and meaning of existing system. “In most Western countries, the number of people who identify as atheist, agnostic, or having no religious affiliation has been increasing, while the number of people who identify as religious has been declining” (Zuckerman 47). Wells’ succinct prophecy about the sexual revolution that would take place during the twentieth century represents a remarkable insight.

The old ethical principles, the principle of equivalents or justice, the principle of self-sacrifice, the various vague and arbitrary ideas of purity, chastity, and sexual “sin,” came like rays out of the theological and philosophical lanterns men carried in the darkness. The ray of the lantern indicated and directed and one followed it as one follows a path. But now

there has come a new view of man's place in the scheme of time and space, a new illumination, dawn; the lantern rays fade in the growing brightness, and the lanterns that shone so brightly are becoming smoky and dim. (Wells, *Anticipations* 293)

Before the advent of the Sexual revolution, sexual conduct was usually regarded as a topic that should be kept private and was considered as a taboo. However, the sexual revolution brought about noteworthy transformations in the ways in which society viewed premarital sex, contraception, LGBTQ rights, sexual liberty and feminism. The modernists believed that "the first step toward liberation is to make sex itself an acceptable topic of conversation" (Steinem 105).

Wells also anticipated the rise of an intense fervour of eugenics in the future society. He posited that the prevailing society would presume that "It is in the sterilization of failures and not in the success for breeding, that the possibility of an improvement of human stock lies" (Partington 521-522). Under the Nazi Germany, eugenics policies were taken to an extreme, with the government implementing a program of forced sterilization and ultimate genocide against people who were considered as "inferior" and "unworthy of life", such as Jews, Romani people, homosexuals and individuals with disabilities. Canada also implemented eugenic policies, with several provinces passing laws that allowed for the forced sterilization of individuals deemed "unfit". This practice continued until the 1970s.

*Anticipations* received a tremendous reception and led to Wells' emergence as a serious socio-political thinker. The book stands as a distinguished sociological treatise by Wells, delving into topics such as international relation, social stratification, scientific progress and ethics. Moreover, Wells' prophetic insights have manifested in their entirety, elevating this work as an example of literary synchronicity within the modernist epoch. Its manifestation is not limited to a singular dimension, but extends across various facets such as cultural, social, economic, political and technological domains.

## CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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