

# H. G. Wells's Interwar Utopias: Eugenics, Individuality and the Crowd

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## Introduction

The problem of revitalizing the nation and bringing up good citizens acquired a renewed significance during the interwar years in Britain. In the words of David Matless, '[d]ebates over an 'A1' or 'C3' nation went back to the eugenic 'National Efficiency' drive which followed the revelation of poor physical capacity in Boer War recruits'.<sup>1</sup> This persistent trope was also related to, and frequently informed by, a more general socio-cultural climate that involved a complex coexistence and cross-fertilization of evolutionary ideas and Nietzschean philosophy. As David Stack explains, G. B. Shaw, Beatrice and Sidney Webb, Ramsay MacDonald, among others, used the ideas of evolution as a caveat to the degenerative drift of capitalism and as a bulwark of an organically developing society.<sup>2</sup> Just as Darwinism preoccupied writers and thinkers across the political spectrum, Nietzsche's impact on the Edwardian and interwar views on degeneration was felt, according to Dan Stone, across nationally conscious discourses.<sup>3</sup> Given its contemporary urgency, the problem of national revitalization also galvanized H. G. Wells's utopian imaginings, which were in conversation with evolutionary ideas and with the projections of the overman.

As early as 'Human Evolution, An Artificial Process' (1896), Wells argued that the differences between the natural and the evolved man were minimal in terms of evolutionary changes. The more significant

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<sup>1</sup> David Matless, *Landscape and Englishness* (London: Reaktion Books, 1998), p. 91.

<sup>2</sup> David Stack, *The First Darwinian Left: Socialism and Darwinism, 1859–1914* (Cheltenham: New Clarion Press, 2003), pp. 88, 115.

<sup>3</sup> Dan Stone, *Breeding Superman: Nietzsche, Race and Eugenics in Edwardian and Interwar Britain* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2002), p. 65.

distinctions would consist in the accumulation of 'moral suggestions and knowledge', which characterized the evolved man.<sup>4</sup> Wells's evolutionary perspective on the two types of humanity can be placed in the wider context of the literary practice of doubling, which was particularly prominent in the fin de siècle. As Linda Dryden demonstrates, 'horrors occurring in the heart of the modern metropolis' activated the images of degenerate souls (in Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and R. L. Stevenson's *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*) and subterranean sweatshops (in Wells's *When the Sleeper Wakes*).<sup>5</sup> These representations of the darker sides of life threw into relief the duality of human nature and exposed 'metropolitan anxieties springing from the lived experiences of the late-Victorian public'.<sup>6</sup> In utopian fiction, the practice of doubling heralds a substantial betterment of mankind, insofar as the horrors of living are ironed out not only by social, but also by physical reconstitution.

Indeed, in *A Modern Utopia* (1905), Wells supplies the contemporary Englishman with an evolved, and therefore superhuman, double. While visiting Utopia, the main character comes to a realization that his thumb marks, collected for the purposes of identification, happen to match the personal record of a Utopian. He first deems this coincidence to be a mere failure in the Utopian database storing up individual information. Then he allows the possibility of 'a grotesque encounter, as of something happening in a looking glass'.<sup>7</sup> The protagonist's anticipated projection of his identity into the future permits Harvey Quamen to discern in *A Modern Utopia* 'a hall of mirrors: Wells resembles, but is not identical to, the Owner of the Voice who in turn resembles, but is not identical to, the main character who resembles, but is not identical to, his Utopian double'.<sup>8</sup> This chain of resemblances arguably testifies to an underlying continuity whereby the main character ascertains 'a strange link of essential identity, a sympathy, an understanding' between himself and his Utopian double.<sup>9</sup> At the same time, the Utopian double is reported to belong to a caste of highly

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<sup>4</sup> H. G. Wells, 'Human Evolution, An Artificial Process,' *Fortnightly Review* 60.358 (1896), p. 594.

<sup>5</sup> Linda Dryden, *The Modern Gothic and Literary Doubles: Stevenson, Wilde and Wells*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), p. 15.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 188.

<sup>7</sup> H. G. Wells, *A Modern Utopia* [1905], intro. Mark R. Hillegas, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1967), p. 229.

<sup>8</sup> Harvey N. Quamen, 'Unnatural Interbreeding: H. G. Wells's *A Modern Utopia* as Species and Genre,' *Victorian Literature and Culture* 33 (2005), p. 74.

<sup>9</sup> Wells, *Utopia*, p. 229.

accomplished citizens, and is therefore superior to the protagonist: 'He is a little taller than I, younger looking and sounder looking ... His training has been subtly finer than mine; he has made himself a better face than mine'.<sup>10</sup>

The fact that the Utopian double improves on the Englishman's physical and social qualities has further resonances in Wells's interwar utopian fictions. This conception permeates both *Men Like Gods* (1923) and *The Shape of Things to Come* (1933). In *Men Like Gods*, the Utopians display visible signs of superiority in their longer lifespan, taller build, and fairer complexion. In the perception of Mr Barnstaple, the protagonist of *Men Like Gods*, 'theirs was a cleansed and perfected humanity, and it seemed to him that they were gods'.<sup>11</sup> Distinctive features are also intrinsic to the Utopians' character, which is noted for 'cleanliness, truth, candour and helpfulness, confidence in the world, fearlessness and a sense of belonging to the great purpose of the race' (*MLG*, p. 375). *The Shape of Things to Come* charts the progression of the world up until the year 2106, from 'the Age of Frustration' to 'the Modern State in control of life'. The rise of the Modern State entails the expansion of a regulated education and the subsequent proliferation of polymaths, who are eventually replaced by what Wells envisages as a new species of man that will live longer and more cooperatively.<sup>12</sup> From the above brief outline, it follows that the assets of the Utopian double are premised on the transformations that involve humanity's appearance, character, and social milieu.

This article examines the ways in which Wells's conception of the Utopian double mediates a response to the nation-wide fears of a degenerative drift. In order to comprehend how the contemporary emphases on national revitalization filter into the vision of a World State, this article reads Wells's utopian fictions in the context of his other writings, which problematize the use of education and eugenics in the imagination of a global future. A further question this article addresses is one of individuality. If the Utopian double is to bear the hallmarks of a superman, to what extent is his character commensurable with existing national susceptibilities?

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<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 247.

<sup>11</sup> H. G. Wells, *Men Like Gods* [1923], in *H. G. Wells: Classic Collection II*, (London: Gollancz, 2011), p. 372. Hereafter referenced parenthetically as *MLG*.

<sup>12</sup> H. G. Wells, *The Shape of Things to Come* [1933], (London: Gollancz, 2011), p. 421. Hereafter referenced parenthetically as *STC*.

## 1. Education and Eugenics

Among factors contributing to Wells's conception of the Utopian double, education and eugenics acquire a special and frequently conflicted prominence. Urthred, one of the characters in *Men Like Gods*, points to the dividing chasm between the mind-sets of the Earthlings and their Utopian counterparts, which he attributes to education:

Yours are Age of Confusion minds, trained to conflict, trained to insecurity and secret self-seeking. In that fashion Nature and your state have taught you to live and so you must needs live until you die. Such lessons are to be unlearnt only in ten thousand generations, by the slow education of three thousand years. (*MLG*, p. 272)

The growth of a World State is inseparable for Wells from the spread of education, which lays the foundation of what he terms in his economic study *The Work, Wealth and Happiness of Mankind* (1931) 'the universal human persona'.<sup>13</sup> However, the attainment of such a persona is seriously hampered, in Wells's judgement, by the lamentable state of education, when viewed from the vantage point of a fulfilled utopian future. *The Shape of Things to Come* provides the following assessment: not only did education in the Age of Frustration indulge in 'patriotic twaddle' and keep knowledge explicitly outside formal schooling, but there was also 'practically no philosophical education at all in the world, no intelligent criticism of generalizations and general ideas. There was no science of social processes at all' (*STC*, p. 82). Such a retrospective diagnosis is fully consonant with Wells's other criticisms of the contemporary system of education. In *Experiment in Autobiography* (1934), Wells comments that the 1870 Education Act was meant 'to educate the lower classes for employment on lower-class lines, with specially trained, inferior teachers who had no university quality'.<sup>14</sup> Whereas Wells as a student of a National School had to undergo training mainly in his teacher's volatile moods and deficient professionalism, the protagonist of his 'condition-of-England' novel *The New Machiavelli* (1911) is exposed to a schooling in which there are always model replies to the same questions. Similarly, the main

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<sup>13</sup> H. G. Wells, *The Work, Wealth and Happiness of Mankind* [1931], (London: William Heinemann, 1932), p. 718.

<sup>14</sup> H. G. Wells, *Experiment in Autobiography: Discoveries and Conclusions of a Very Ordinary Brain (since 1866)*, (London: Victor Gollancz and The Cresset Press, 1934), p. 93.

character of *The History of Mr Polly* (1910) bears the brunt of educational mismanagement. The imaginary picture of Empire instructing her 'English children' about 'their essential nobility and knighthood' falls short of Polly's long-term expectations. Instead, he is eventually left with the compression of his 'mind and soul in the educational institutions of his time', indigestion and mispronounced words.<sup>15</sup> Notably, John Carey construes Polly's lost educational opportunities as 'Wells's rage at the national expenditure on armaments, which ... has stunted the lives of millions of children'.<sup>16</sup> But what Carey importantly overlooks is Polly's constant search for a difference that his ordinary life could not provide. Undoubtedly, his failed suicidal attempt at his house, as well as his fluke heroism at the Potwell Inn, contain an ironic commentary on the lengths to which Polly goes in seeking maturity and self-fulfilment. He learns more from life than his formal education ever afforded. Much as this statement brings the effectiveness of institutional schooling almost to a minimum, it throws into relief the protagonist's inherent receptivity to learning and his disposition to change. The penultimate chapter of *The History of Mr Polly* tellingly opens with a line central to Wells's utopianism: 'If the world does not please you, *you can change it*'.<sup>17</sup> The state of national education in England, as Wells depicts it, may be deficient and mismanaged, but the first stirrings of the Utopian double are with those who are responsive and resolute.

Whereas Polly's character evolves in a largely idyllic rural England, the eponymous protagonists of *Joan and Peter: The Story of an Education* (1918) gain insight into the more valuable qualities of the English character in the company of their uncle Oswald Sydenham. The novel is interspersed with the latter's pronouncements about the duality of Britain, which is at once badly and properly placed to manifest its genuine character: 'We have an empire as big as the world and an imagination as small as a parish'.<sup>18</sup> The nation's alleged parochialism is solely assigned to the system of education: as in *The History of Mr Polly*, it comes across as inappropriate. It effectively disseminates habits and attitudes of isolation that are incongruous with the necessity to maintain a more knowledgeable international outreach. As Oswald notes, '[t]he habit of detachment was too

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<sup>15</sup> H. G. Wells, *The History of Mr Polly*, (London: Thomas Nelson, 1910), p. 23.

<sup>16</sup> John Carey, *The Intellectuals and the Masses: Pride and Prejudice among the Literary Intelligentsia, 1880–1939*, (London: Faber and Faber, 1992), p. 141.

<sup>17</sup> Wells, *Polly*, p. 283.

<sup>18</sup> H. G. Wells, *Joan and Peter: The Story of an Education*, (London: Cassell, 1918), p. 276.

deeply ingrained. Great Britain was an island of onlookers'.<sup>19</sup> The fundamental sense of isolation to which the novel refers does not seem to do sufficient justice to the national system of education, especially before the Great War. In a study of English patriotism, Stephen Heathorn observes that the ideas about the nation propagated in the classroom 'were ultimately successful enough to induce millions of working-class men and women to willingly sacrifice their lives and loved ones to the demands of the nation-state in the cataclysmic clash of rival nationalisms that erupted in 1914'.<sup>20</sup> This statement sheds some light on the vividly patriotic, if not nationalistic, aspect of English education. However, both Heathorn and Wells's mouthpiece in *Joan and Peter* are reluctant to acknowledge the immediate effect that the Great War produced on all those 'onlookers' who found themselves fighting for England in Belgium and France. Their professed sense of isolation would not have taken them far. Growing sensitive to this realization towards the end of the novel, Oswald tones down his critique and reveals his understanding of the English ideals:

I tell you there is no race and no tradition in the whole world that I would change for my English race and tradition. I do not mean the brief tradition of this little Buckingham Palace and Westminster system here that began yesterday and will end tomorrow, I mean the great tradition of the English that is spread all over the earth, the tradition of Shakespeare and Milton, of Newton and Bacon, of Runnymede and Agincourt, the tradition of the men who speak fairly and act fairly, without harshness and without fear, who face whatever odds there are against them and take no account of Kings.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 578.

<sup>20</sup> Stephen Heathorn, *For Home, Country, and Race: Constructing Gender, Class, and Englishness in the Elementary School, 1880–1914*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), p. 218.

<sup>21</sup> Wells, *Joan and Peter*, p. 725.

The mention of Bacon in the company of Shakespeare, Milton and Newton immediately brings back the figure of Francis Bacon, the English statesman, empirical thinker and essayist. In *A Modern Utopia*, Wells aligns his vision of Utopian science with what Bacon pictured in *The New Atlantis* (1627) as Saloman's House, a body of scientists obtaining knowledge from all corners of the globe. Advocating the continuous growth of science, Wells relates more to Bacon's 'foreshadowings' than to Morris's return to nature (Wells, *Utopia*, p. 100). Besides, in articulating Oswald's views on fairness, Wells might also have in mind Roger Bacon, a medieval English philosopher. In his autobiography, Wells paralleled his own vocation in life with that of Roger Bacon: 'I play at being such a man as he

Oswald's confession indicates his fundamental attachments to national culture, rather than the political continuity vested in the monarchy and parliamentary government. It also brings out the idiom of the English character, which is associated with fairness. In his account of Britain's intellectual life in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, Stefan Collini elucidates the discourse of the national character through the notion of fair play, typical of organized games such as cricket. Extending the principle of fairness to the discourse of character, he contends that, during this period, it 'was an expression of a deeply ingrained perception of the qualities needed to cope with life, an ethic with strong roots in areas of experience ostensibly remote from politics'.<sup>22</sup> Along these lines, Oswald's privileging of fair actions and words points up a quality which is closely linked with a wider understanding of the English character.

Wells puts the ideal of fairness to a number of imaginative and highly suggestive lengths in his conception of the Utopian double. On proclaiming as their motto 'Our education is our government' (*MLG*, p. 254), the Utopians have acted consistently in dismissing both politicians and lawyers as anachronistic phenomena. Utopia's revenue from natural resources gets fairly distributed in such a way that a child is granted a credit 'sufficient to educate and maintain him up to four- or five-and-twenty, and then he was expected to choose some occupation to replenish his account' (*MLG*, p. 382). If one fails to start a job, his or her idleness figures as a psychological disorder, not a financial crime; the Earthlings receive a further explanation of the Utopian work ethic: 'It is a pleasant world indeed for holidays, but not for those who would continuously do nothing' (*MLG*, p. 254). As a result, this beautiful and just society is largely secured by its citizens' access to, and acquisition of, professional knowledge, and subsequent work. If read in this light, Wells's vision of a World State/Utopia fully outgrows the educational deficiencies of contemporary England, making education a central socio-political force.

Alongside education, the nationally conscious ideal of fairness lies at the foundation of the Utopians' attitudes. While briefing the Earthlings about the socio-political arrangements in Utopia, Urthred promises: 'We will try our utmost to deal fairly and friendly with you if you will respect

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was, a man altogether lonely and immediately futile, a man lit by a vision of a world still some centuries ahead, convinced of its reality and urgency, and yet powerless to bring it nearer' (Wells, *Experiment*, p. 729).

<sup>22</sup> Stefan Collini, *Public Moralists: Political Thought and Intellectual Life in Britain, 1850–1930*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), p. 116.

our laws and ways' (*MLG*, p. 272). This pledge of fair treatment evokes the opening scene of Francis Bacon's *The New Atlantis* (1627). A crew of English sailors are equally promised admittance to the island of Bensalem, provided that they swear by their Christian faith and own up to not having shed blood, either lawfully or otherwise, in the last several weeks. Once through this searching interrogation, the company later find themselves in a fair city with three fair streets, a fair and spacious house, a fair parlour, among 'men more fair and admirable'.<sup>23</sup> The ninefold repetition of the epithet 'fair', which is used to describe the comely appearance of buildings and people, is bounded up with Bensalem's consistent and moderate practices which can also be regarded as being fair. The island's scientific advances render the laws redundant, as everyone abides by 'the reverence of a man's self, ... the chiefest bridle of all vices'.<sup>24</sup> The pun on the word 'fair', implicit in *The New Atlantis*, thus becomes deliberate in *Men Like Gods*.

However, what complicates the realization of fairness in its two major meanings (just and beautiful) is the entanglement of Utopian education with eugenic practices, resulting in a pool of fair-looking people. On the eve of his forced departure from Utopia, Barnstaple looks back on the fairness of the Utopian order and wishes to see it take effect in his space-time: 'Earth too would grow rich with loveliness and fair as this great land was fair. The sons of Earth also, purified from disease, sweet-minded and strong and beautiful, would go proudly about their conquered planet and lift their daring to the stars' (*MLG*, p. 403). Barnstaple's anticipations are clearly informed by his attention to the Utopians' physical fairness. Besides education, Patrick Parrinder detects in Wells's utopias 'an unrecognizable physical evolution, brought about by eugenics rather than natural selection'.<sup>25</sup> Indeed, two times in *Men Like Gods*, Wells indicates that eugenics has begun in Utopia (*MLG*, pp. 263, 313). Wider applications of positive eugenics are signalled in *The Shape of Things to Come*, again in tandem with the educational effort, which is expected to guide man's becoming 'generation by generation a new species, differing more widely from that weedy, tragic, pathetic, cruel, fantastic, absurd and sometimes sheerly horrible being who christened himself in a mood of oafish arrogance *Homo sapiens*' (*STC*, p. 420).

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<sup>23</sup> Francis Bacon, *New Atlantis* [1627], in *Three Early Modern Utopias: Utopia, New Atlantis, The Isle of Pines*, ed. Susan Bruce, (Oxford: Oxford World's Classics, 1999), pp. 152, 155, 173.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 174.

<sup>25</sup> Patrick Parrinder, *H. G. Wells*, (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1970), p. 10.

Apart from exposure to the educational impact governing Utopia, the conception of the Utopian double is derived from the theory and practice of eugenics. In *Men Like Gods*, Barnstaple, overwhelmed by 'the firm clear beauty of face and limb that every Utopian displayed', learns about the limits of eugenics: 'The Utopians told of eugenic beginnings, of a new and surer decision in the choice of parents, of an increasing certainty in the science of heredity.' (*MLG*, p. 263). Wells takes eugenic policies much further in his later vision of a World State conjured up in *The Shape of Things to Come*: '[T]his painless destruction of monsters and the more dreadful and pitiful sorts of defective was legalized, and also the sterilization of various types that would otherwise have transmitted tendencies that were painfully undesirable' (*STC*, p. 388). The disturbing aspect of these policies is prompted by the historical context in which they were proposed. Before and during the Great War, when Britain was again faced with anxieties about the nation's mental and physical decline, eugenic ideas continued to emerge in the mainstream of the political agenda. In his critical examination *Eugenics and Other Evils* (1917), G. K. Chesterton labelled the initiatives to legalize sterilization as the advent of the Eugenic State: 'The first of the Eugenic Laws has already been adopted by the Government of this country; and passed with the applause of both parties through the dominant House of Parliament'.<sup>26</sup> Here Chesterton refers back to the 1913 Mental Deficiency Act, which defined three categories of mental defective ('idiot', 'imbecile' and 'feeble-minded') and prescribed institutional detention, not sterilization, of people with relevant handicaps. Chesterton apprehended that England was likely to tread down the path of eugenics and arrive at what Hilaire Belloc called 'the Servile State'.<sup>27</sup> In Chesterton's words, England 'has almost certainly missed the Socialist State. But we are already under the Eugenist State; and nothing remains to us but rebellion'.<sup>28</sup> Interestingly, after this outspoken response to the reputed flowering of eugenics in England, there was only one major parliamentary campaign to legalize voluntary sterilization in 1931, which had not garnered sufficient support. According to Desmond King and Randall Hansen, '[t]he request, which was portrayed by its opponents as

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<sup>26</sup> G. K. Chesterton, *Eugenics and Other Evils* [1917], (London: Cassell, 1922), p. 19.

<sup>27</sup> Hilaire Belloc, *An Examination of Socialism*, (London: Catholic Trust Society, 1908), p. 5.

<sup>28</sup> Chesterton, p. 21.

fundamentally anti-working class, was defeated by 167 votes to 89'.<sup>29</sup> In this context, Wells's intermittent advocacy of both positive and negative eugenic methods appears to be more marginal than it would have been during the earlier decades of the twentieth century.

The publication of *The Shape of Things to Come* coincided with the adoption of the Eugenic Law in Germany in 1933. Initially imposing sterilization in the case of mental illness, genetic malformations, and alcoholism, the Law culminated in the 1935 'Act for the Protection of German Blood and German Honour'.<sup>30</sup> In the estimation of Peter Weingart, who has investigated the attempts to rationalize human evolution in Germany, the aforesaid Act 'reflected the unholy combination of eugenic thinking and Germanic race doctrines which under the Nazis had crystallized into a government-sponsored anti-Semitism'.<sup>31</sup> However, what matters is not only a temporal coincidence with Wells's eugenic concerns, but that these concerns had a long history of their own. In *Anticipations* (1901), for example, Wells gives voice to his understanding of the Jewish question: 'If the Jew has a certain incurable tendency to social parasitism, and we make social parasitism impossible, we shall abolish the Jew, and if he has not, there is no need to abolish the Jew'.<sup>32</sup> The ambiguity of such considerations is connected with the verb 'to abolish', which suggests extermination. But given Wells's insistence on the coalescence of identities into a cosmopolitanism, 'to abolish' may mean to re-educate the Jew. *The Shape of Things to Come* confirms the latter interpretation in a number of ways. Pinning down the Jewish sense of exceptionalism to their religion, Wells describes the Jew as 'a breach in the collective solidarity everywhere ... One could never tell whether a Jew was being a citizen or whether he was being just a Jew' (*STC*, pp. 376–7). To that end, the World State is devised to rectify the Jew's peculiarities 'in the food of either of his body or his mind' (*STC*, p. 377). This arrangement is expected to engender a complete solidarity of the world, rendered by Wells as being 'full as ever it was of men and women of Semitic origin, but they belong no more to

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<sup>29</sup> Desmond King and Randall Hansen, 'Experts at Work: State, Social Learning and Eugenic Sterilization in 1930s Britain,' *British Journal of Political Science* 19 (1999), p. 85.

<sup>30</sup> Peter Weingart, 'Eugenic Utopias—Blueprints for the Rationalization of Human Evolution,' *Nineteen Eighty-Four: Science Between Utopia and Dystopia*, ed. Everett Mendelsohn and Helga Nowotny, (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1984), p. 184.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> H. G. Wells, *Anticipations of the Reaction of Mechanical and Scientific Progress upon Human Life and Thought* [1901], (London: Chapman and Hall, 1914), p. 316.

“Israel” (STC, p. 378). Although some of the conceptual premises of the eugenic legislation in Nazi Germany and Wells’s support for respective practices sound worryingly homologous, there is clearly—crude as it may sound—a difference between the educational coercion of the Jews in the World State and their physical extermination in the Holocaust. There is also an undeniable difference of degree between the Mental Deficiency Act in England and the Eugenic Law in Germany, to say nothing of their subsequent applications. These differences, to use Stone’s classification, fall into two categories: a ‘theoretical and ideational background’, and ‘action’. So long as eugenic ideas did not fully cross the boundary between theory and practice in England, they have been interpreted as ‘the extremes of Englishness’.<sup>33</sup> To use this conciliatory and largely normative logic, Wells’s conception of the Utopian double may be made to seem nearly un-English. Because Wells negotiates the Utopian double on the basis of eugenic practices, his conception, at least retrospectively, occurs in the margins of the contemporary constructions of England.

Wells’s other writings on the theme of a World State further demonstrate his consistent adherence to eugenic principles, but with one noteworthy peculiarity. As Chesterton insightfully concedes, ‘if I were restricted, on grounds of public economy, to giving Mr Wells only one medal *ob cives servatos*, I would give him a medal as the Eugenist who destroyed Eugenics’.<sup>34</sup> Chesterton explains his commendation by the challenge that Wells presented to the eugenicists as early as *Mankind in the Making* (1903), in which he questioned the inheritance of health. Since health is not a quality but a balance, its breeding in the course of parental selection proves impracticable. Perhaps Wells’s attention to this legitimate challenge eventually allowed him to project ‘a different animal’ in the citizen of the Modern State, who had emerged ‘from the honest application of the Obvious to health, education, and economic organization, within little more than a hundred years’ (STC, p. 322). Aside from these measures, Wells enforces an ethical limit beyond which the creation of the Utopian double may be accomplished solely by educational means. As a caveat, Wells proceeds to conclude in *The Work, Wealth and Happiness of Mankind*: ‘The deliberate improvement of man’s inherent quality is at present unattainable. It is to a better education and to a better education alone, therefore, that we must look for any hope of ameliorating substantially the confusions and distresses of our present life’.<sup>35</sup> This

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<sup>33</sup> Stone, p. 4.

<sup>34</sup> Chesterton, p. 70.

<sup>35</sup> Wells, *Work*, pp. 679–80.

conclusion echoes Wells's views on the role of a fair education discussed above, and ties into the ethical foundations of his idea of the 'artificial factor'.

In his study of Wells's *Cosmopolis*, John Partington traces the idea of the 'artificial factor in man' to T. H. Huxley's conception of ethical evolution. Even though T. H. Huxley distinguished the 'cosmic process', which permits the fittest to survive, from 'social progress' that favours 'those who are ethically the best', he did not consider these two factors in opposition.<sup>36</sup> As Partington clarifies, 'not only is "ethical man" the result of natural evolution, but humanity's use of ethics to tame the "cosmic process" is also a part of nature'.<sup>37</sup> Along these lines, Wells's aspirations for the improvement of humanity, either biological or social, target the 'artificial factor in man' and are not ethically at variance with natural evolution. In *The Shape of Things to Come*, the narrator Dr Philip Raven supplies a most valid confirmation of this theory: a citizen of the World State is presented to be 'less gregarious in his instincts and less suggestible ... but he is far more social and unselfish in his ideology and mental habits. He is, in fact, for all the identity of his heredity, a different animal. He is bigger and stronger, more clear-headed, with more self-control and more definitely related to his fellow creatures' (*STC*, pp. 408–9). Because this profile of the Utopian double is focused on attitudinal and mental characteristics, it makes little use of heredity. Whereas the betterment of man's physical qualities originates from parental selection and breeding the defective out, ideology and mentality at large can only be the outcomes of education.

Because Wells's reservations concerning the use of eugenic methods are not rare, his vision of a World State is in conflict about education and heredity. Even though education and eugenics reinforce each other in his conception of the Utopian double, Wells repeatedly stresses the need of an education that would guarantee fair provisions. In an essay on eugenic thinking, Partington fully rehabilitates Wells the eugenicist, who, afflicted by a knowledge of the death camps operating in Central Europe during the Second World War, was forced 'to reject [eugenics] out of hand'.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> T. H. Huxley, *Evolution and Ethics* [1893], in T. H. Huxley and Julian Huxley, *Evolution and Ethics, 1893–1943*, (London: The Pilot Press, 1947), p. 81.

<sup>37</sup> John S. Partington, *Building Cosmopolis: The Political Thought of H. G. Wells*, (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), p. 28.

<sup>38</sup> John S. Partington, 'H. G. Wells's Eugenic Thinking of the 1930s and 1940s,' *Utopian Studies* 14.1 (2003), p. 79.

However, if the Utopian double is to epitomize fairness, being both just and beautiful, his identity is inextricable not only from the idiom of the English character, but also from the contemporary national conundrum: during the interwar years, eugenics and education continued to exchange discursive energies.

## 2. Utopian Individuality and the Crowd

Both *Men Like Gods* and *The Shape of Things to Come* promote individuality. Because Wells's vision of a World State forbids anyone without an individualizing distinction, it becomes an onus for a Utopian to study and work hard, in order to develop in several directions, like a polymath. Thus, Crystal, a thirteen-year-old youth, apart from majoring in natural sciences and mathematics, 'is reading history in a holiday stage of his education' (*MLG*, p. 372). *The Shape of Things to Come* complements this understanding of individuality: 'We do not suppress individuality; we do not destroy freedom; we destroy obsessions and remove temptations. The world is still full of misleading doctrines, dangerous imitations and treacherous suggestions, and it is the duty of government to erase these' (*STC*, p. 347). However, some Wellsian scholars are prone to question the theoretical foundations and practical implications of individuality in Wells's writings. Parrinder and Partington are unanimous in arguing that Wells rejected liberal individualism,<sup>39</sup> while Carey suggests that with time 'Wells began to doubt not only whether individuality could be allowed but whether it existed at all'<sup>40</sup>.

The individuality of the Utopian double may be read as a reaction against the theory and practice of *laissez-faire*, which had its roots in free trade and later came to refer to governmental non-involvement in the domestic economy and other social spheres. The Utopian double, conceived in Wells's utopias, notably contests *laissez-faire*, which is implicated in the Spencerian formula of 'the survival of the fittest'. In *The Shape of Things to Come*, the project of a regulated capitalism, set forth by J. M. Keynes, one of the leading economists of the time, is viewed as being insufficient, despite the fact that it wins 'an increased adherence' (*STC*, p. 249). Indeed, in his polemical pamphlet *The End of Laissez-Faire* (1926), Keynes gives vent to his deep concern about the precepts of *laissez-faire*

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<sup>39</sup> Parrinder, p. 13; Partington, *Cosmopolis*, p. 2.

<sup>40</sup> Carey, p. 147.

individualism: 'It is *not* a correct deduction from the Principle of Economics that enlightened self-interest always operates in the public interest. Nor is it true that self-interest generally *is* enlightened'.<sup>41</sup> Alongside individual enterprise, which, as Keynes believes, cannot be abolished unless it fails to deliver, the state should be permitted to take over 'those things which at present are not done at all'.<sup>42</sup> The Keynesian compromise instigates state control over unemployment and labour, savings and investment, as well as population. Regardless of Keynes's opposition to the expansion of *laissez-faire*, Wells censures these proposals as an attempt at safeguarding 'some existing political system by all sorts of artificial barriers and restraints from the world at large, in order to develop [a] peculiar system within its confines' (*STC*, p. 249).

Conversely, in *Men Like Gods*, the Utopian system of controls displaces 'a limited and legalized struggle of men and women to get the better of one another', and sanctions the 'idea of creative service' (*MLG*, pp. 249–50). In the eyes of Rupert Catskill, this transition can only end in degeneration, once competitive forces are withdrawn from social interaction. Yet Catskill's opinion is found to be exclusively reliant on factors external to the actual process of competition. As Urthred contends, 'it is not true that competition has gone from our world ... everyone here works to his or her utmost—for service and distinction ... There is no way but knowledge out of the cages of life' (*MLG*, p. 269). True, the transition from *laissez-faire* to the Utopian type of individualism is paradoxically based on the totality of state intervention, which Wells promotes in *The Shape of Things to Come*: 'Never before was man so directed and disciplined' (*STC*, p. 392). But on the way to the further realization of a World State, the role of the state diminishes, and creative service allows immediate occasions for the expression of individuality; in *Men Like Gods*, Barnstaple observes:

And down there under the blue haze of the great plain almost all those who were not engaged in the affairs of food and architecture, health, education and the correlation of activities, were busied upon creative work; they were continually exploring the world without or the world within, through scientific research and artistic creation. They were continually

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<sup>41</sup> John Maynard Keynes, *The End of Laissez-Faire*, (London: The Hogarth Press, 1926), p. 39.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 47.

adding to their collective power over life or to the realized worth of life. (*MLG*, p. 311)

The Utopians' professional occupations afford additional insight into the practice of individualism. Some of the Utopians, with whom the Earthlings interact, represent certain departments of knowledge to which their society attaches importance. Barnstaple remarks: 'Everyone was doing work that fitted natural aptitudes and appealed to the imagination of the worker. Everyone worked happily and eagerly—as those people we call geniuses do on our Earth' (*MLG*, p. 374). As a specialist in physio-chemistry, Serpentine explains the theories of 'space-and-time universes, parallel to one another and resembling each other' (*MLG*, p. 236). Cedar works as a cytologist, running an improvised sanatorium where the Earthlings are quarantined in order to prevent the epidemic from spreading (*MLG*, p. 318). Urthred's expert areas include ethnology and history. These competences allow Urthred to trace the development of humanity into a Utopian race whose progress hinges on the applications of the will.

The Utopians understand will as key to harnessing nature, whose actions they see as illogical, ruthless and incompetent. In Urthred's words, nature 'made us by accident; all her children are bastards—undesired; she will cherish or expose them, pet or starve or torment without rhyme or reason'. In order to combat nature's adverse and whimsical conduct, the Utopians rely on their will 'to learn it and cease to fear it, to know it and comprehend it and master it' (*MLG*, p. 270). The mastering of nature by the force of will governs the most ambitious cosmological interventions, to which Sungold, probably the oldest Utopian with whom Barnstaple holds conference, refers as 'no more than a beginning' of a 'Life of which you and I are but anticipatory atoms and eddies, life will awaken indeed, one and whole and marvellous, like a child awaking to conscious life' (*MLG*, p. 396). The continuously expanding horizons of the Utopian endeavour are signalled by the vocabulary that describes an existence on the threshold of a higher order of reality. Where the Utopians aspire to reach the stars and other planets through their constant applications of the will, for Barnstaple the will promises a plausible passage of humanity to Utopia: "'Given the will," said Mr Barnstaple. "Given the will." . . .' (*MLG*, p. 403). Being an active force in Utopia, the will is also associated with power. In her dissenting evaluation, Lychnis equates her fellow Utopians' projects with the following aspirations:

They have changed a wild planet of disease and disorder into a sphere of beauty and safety. They have made the wilderness of human motives bear union and knowledge and power.

And research never rests, and curiosity and the desire for more power and still more power consumes all our world. (*MLG*, p. 368)

Engrossed in the study of compassion, a quality almost completely absent from the Utopian society, Lychnis laments the staggering lack of emotion. In a conversation, Barnstaple learns about her nephew: 'Crystal, Utopian youth, was as hard as his name. When he had slipped one day on some rocks and twisted and torn his ankle, he had limped but he had laughed' (*MLG*, p. 387). By the same token, death, should it be confronted fearlessly, is the cause of gladness, not sympathy. Falling out with such sentiments, Lychnis discerns overhuman qualities in the Utopians' impregnable psychology. Such a forsworn capacity for self-pity and empathy, coupled with relentless yearnings for the stars, suggests equivalences with Friedrich Nietzsche's projection of the overman in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1883–1885). The immediate impact of Nietzsche on Wells's utopianism is a largely contestable and unexplored area. In a recent monograph on the early fiction of Wells, Steven MacLean has ascribed the scorn for 'universal morality', which characterizes Griffin in *The Invisible Man* (1897), to 'a possible Nietzschean influence'.<sup>43</sup> This declaratory remark, interesting in itself, requires further critical analysis on the level of textual evidence and Wells's direct responses to Nietzsche. Always intent on 'overcoming itself', the overman, like the Utopians in *Men Like Gods*, is goal-oriented and presents the pinnacle of mankind's ascent from the depths.<sup>44</sup> These textual homologies are in direct correspondence with G. B. Shaw's earlier vindication of the overman. In his preface to *Major Barbara* (1907), Shaw tellingly disowns 'the despotism of a single Napoleonic Superman'.<sup>45</sup> Instead, he sees sense in Nietzsche's promotion of the overman as 'the modern objection to Christianity', the latter being 'a

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<sup>43</sup> Steven MacLean, *The Early Fiction of H. G. Wells: Fantasies of Science*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p. 84.

<sup>44</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* [1883–85], trans. Adrian Del Caro, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 89.

<sup>45</sup> Bernard Shaw, *Major Barbara* [1907], ed. Dan H. Laurence, (St. Ives: Penguin Books, 2000), p. 13.

pernicious slave morality'.<sup>46</sup> In *The World of William Clissold* (1926), Wells further registers the contemporary perceptions of Nietzsche's ideas:

Neither Nietzsche's Overman nor Shaw's Superman was really to be thought of as an individual person. Both were plainly the race development, the whole race in progress. But writers with the journalistic instinct to capture got hold of these ideas and cheapened them irremediably, and the popular interpretation of these phrases, the Overman and the Superman, had come to be not a communion of saints but an entirely ridiculous individual figure, a swagger, a provocative mingling of Napoleon Bonaparte, Antinous, and the Admirable Crichton.<sup>47</sup>

Just as William Clissold reacts against a denigration of the allegedly useful concept of the overman, Wells apparently holds Nietzsche in reasonably high esteem. In a letter of 21 February 1922, urging the editors of several literary journals to publish a complete edition of Leo Tolstoy's works in English, Wells commends Nietzsche, alongside Richard Wagner and Henrik Ibsen, as 'three giants': without them 'the XIX century bookshelf of our national libraries' would have been incomplete.<sup>48</sup>

However, Wells's paramount acknowledgement of Nietzsche and his philosophy as a break-through in conceptualizing mankind's progress takes exception to the principles of morality exercised by the Utopians. In *Men Like Gods*, the conception of the Utopian double is interlaced not only with overhuman qualities, but also with responsibility. Thus, Crystal points Barnstaple's attention to the existence of latent frustrations and agonies that the Utopians have learnt to muster: 'There is plenty of spite and vanity in every Utopian soul. But people speak very plainly and criticism is very searching and free. So that we learn to search our motives before we praise or question' (*MLG*, p. 383). The practice of enquiry into one's own motives sets a universal moral benchmark which steers the will towards perfecting individuality. Furthermore, in *The Shape of Things to Come*, Wells defines individuality as 'a responsible part of a species. It has become an experiment in feeling, knowing, making and response' (*STC*, p. 423). This definition shapes the Utopian double, enabling a complete change of

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> H. G. Wells, *The World of William Clissold: A Novel at a New Angle*, (London: Ernest Benn, 1926), pp. 93–94.

<sup>48</sup> *The Correspondence of H. G. Wells*, in 4 vols. Volume 3: 1919–1934, ed. David C. Smith, (London: Pickering & Chatto, 1998), p. 97.

sensibilities and mediating an antidote to those irresponsible individuals who, in retrospect, hampered the rise of the World State. Undergirded by the discourse of responsibility, the Utopian double's individuality outgrows the predominantly overhuman implications. At the same time, this version of individualism seems to be uniform and bland; the Utopians' characterless light-heartedness is endorsed with a 'broad' and 'pleasant' smile typical of Urthred, Cedar and Sungold (*MLG*, pp. 242, 319, 389). Moreover, the demise of Serpentine and Cedar in the battle with the Earthlings, which in essence means the loss of two highly qualified scientists, is not duly recalled or remembered. This attitude not only confirms the Utopians' understanding of death, which is never to be bemoaned, but it also implies the ordinariness of each allegedly unique Utopian who can so remorselessly be dispensed with.<sup>49</sup> If 'men like gods' are conceived of as individuals whose character manifests itself in their collective work, how are they different from the crowd?

In Wells's interwar utopias, the crowd stands in conceptual opposition to the Utopian double. While conversing with Crystal in *Men Like Gods*, Barnstaple recollects images from 'the world of the Crowd, the world of that detestable crawling mass of un-featured, infected human beings' (*MLG*, p. 385). Crystal in turn assures Barnstaple that '[t]here are no more Crowds in Utopia. Crowds and the crowd-mind have gone for ever' (*MLG*, p. 385). Having witnessed the irrational and barely controllable behaviour of crowds, Barnstaple associates them with mass gatherings and celebrations, like sport, war demonstrations, coronations, and public funerals. The protagonist's critical assessment of the crowd phenomenon is redolent of the social trends in England's national life in the early twentieth century. According to H. Cunningham, changes in the social dynamic

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<sup>49</sup> In the 'Memorandum' that prefaces *Things to Come: A Film Story Based on the Material Contained in His History of the Future The Shape of Things to Come* (1935), Wells stipulates that '[m]en will not be reduced to servitude and uniformity, they will be released to freedom and variety ... The workers to be shown are individualized workers doing responsible cooperative team work. And work will be unobtrusive in the coming civilization' (H. G. Wells, *Things to Come: A Film Story Based on the Material Contained in His History of the Future The Shape of Things to Come* [1935], intro. Allan Asherman and George Zebrowski, (Boston: Gregg Press, 1975), pp.13–14). In a commentary on Wells's 'Memorandum', Laura Marcus observes that 'while Wells may have insisted ... on the individuality of the workers, in the representations of the machine age and the technological utopia, in the final parts of the film the human beings almost disappear from view' (Laura Marcus, *The Tenth Muse: Writing about Cinema in the Modernist Period*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 67).

became acutely visible with the growing circulation of newspapers and a notable increase in the popularity of football matches, seaside resorts and admissions to the cinema.<sup>50</sup> On all such occasions, the number of consumers had risen in geometric progression by 1939. Earlier on, Gustave Le Bon, one of the first critics of the crowd, connected the pervasiveness of crowds in his time to the enfranchisement of the working classes and exhorted that '[t]he age we are about to enter will in truth be the era of crowds'.<sup>51</sup> Since Utopia has distanced itself, both temporally and mentally, from the era to which Le Bon referred, the crowd phenomenon re-emerges solely on cinematographic film, designated in *Men Like Gods* for educational purposes.

In *The Shape of Things to Come*, the crowd and the crowd-mind figure in tandem with the growth of the World State. Wells follows gradual transformations in the make-up of crowds, which initially acquire a military element, then become 'a medley of uniforms' (*STC*, p. 50), and finally develop 'candid interested faces' (*STC*, p. 188). Despite this somewhat favourable improvement on the characteristics of crowds, Wells disparages the group sentiment that unites them; that is, crowds may act, when terror- or panic-stricken, 'like madmen, all formations and distinctions lost' (*STC*, p. 65). Apart from this, Wells registers a pseudo-democratic malaise of the period, which presupposes the treatment of the electorate as a mere crowd of 'prejudiced voters' holding manipulated opinions (*STC*, p. 116). Most importantly, in the context of 1930s Europe, Wells suggestively comments on the propensity of crowds to form an alliance with dictators who offer an 'imaginative refuge ... from hard and competent aristocracy' (*STC*, p. 333). Wells is alert to the danger of crowds ruling against individuality. On this note, his critique resonates with José Ortega y Gasset's condemnation of the masses as a threat to the order of civilization. In *The Revolt of the Masses* (1930), Ortega, to whom Wells dedicated *The Shape of Things to Come*, voiced serious concern about the qualities of the average man that result from the levelling of incomes, culture, social classes, and sexes. Ortega further asserted that the masses were capable of ruling through the state, whose power might become

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<sup>50</sup> H. Cunningham, 'Leisure and Culture,' in *The Cambridge Social History of Britain, 1750–1950*, vol. 2: 'People and Environment,' ed. F. M. L. Thompson, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 311–14.

<sup>51</sup> Gustave Le Bon, *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind* [1895], intro. Robert K. Meron, (New York: Penguin Books, 1977), p. 14.

embodied in a dictatorship erasing 'everything eminent'.<sup>52</sup> In an attempt to prevent crowds from gaining power, Wells eventually restricts their presence to pictorial depictions in the Modern State, which is a practice similar to preserving their images on cinematographic film in Utopia. In *The Shape of Things to Come*, the narrator observes: 'The notebooks ... contain sketches of various members of the Council and some brilliant impressions of crowd effects in the main pavilion' (*STC*, p. 371). The aforesaid notebooks happen to belong to the local artist and poet Theotocopulos, who stands out as a non-conformist and is therefore extremely individualistic.

This latter connection of dissidence and individualism creates a palpable tension between Wells's disavowal of the crowd as a mainstay of irrational behaviour and its arguable validity for questioning authority. Theotocopulos's dissenting nature is given a socio-political prominence in the script of *Things to Come* (1935), as he continues to challenge the progress that incessantly limits human freedom and precludes the joys of living in the here and now: 'Is man *never* to rest, never to be free? A time will come when they will want more cannon fodder for their Space Guns ... Make an end to Progress now ... Between the dark past of history and the incalculable future let us snatch today—and *live*'.<sup>53</sup> But this conflicting campaign, charged with Luddite overtones, is later presented as a platform for the haphazard activity of the crowd: 'The crowd hesitates ... re-entering the city, in a straggling aimless manner, and pausing ever and again to stare at the sky'.<sup>54</sup> In these scenes, the crowd emerges as a de-individualized riposte to the social order. Followed by a featureless mob, Theotocopulos contests the major scientific enterprise of space exploration with his reactionary attitudes. Notably, in *The Shape of Things to Come*, Wells mentions the protagonist's 'anarchistic soul' in one breath with the latter's objections to state intervention into 'private flying, the difficulties in finding scope for his genius, and the general want of beauty and graciousness in life' (*STC*, p. 363). Indeed, Theotocopulos is shown to be atavistically disposed to a bucolic past. His disposition is made to contrast unfavourably with the Utopian type of cooperative individualism, corrected by responsibility.

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<sup>52</sup> José Ortega y Gasset, *The Revolt of the Masses* [1930], trans. Anthony Kerrigan, (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1985), p. 173.

<sup>53</sup> Wells, *Things*, p. 122.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 140.

However, the presence of crowds as occasions for mass mobilization suggests that Wells's investment in the triumph of scientific progress is not absolute, which reaffirms an underlying connection between Utopian individualism and the crowd. This link can be expounded by contemporary discussions of the national character that manifests itself in the crowd phenomenon. In the interwar years, the social situations, which tended to assemble crowds, permitted people to find 'their identities both individually and collectively' in activities outside religion.<sup>55</sup> Besides, Gary Cross and John Walton emphasize, in their book on the geographies of pleasure, that the mind-set of crowds 'reflects less the refinement and manipulation of the masses, than the triumph of particular strands of middle-class and "respectable" popular culture'.<sup>56</sup> In this light, considering that a dominant 'respectable' culture in Wells's utopias is represented by technical and scientific elites, the crowd mind is a necessary extension of the Utopian double. Therefore the revolt of the crowd against technological progress indicates a deep uncertainty which can equally, if covertly, beset the elites. Much as Cabal unequivocally opts for 'conquest after conquest, to the stars', when the crowd is unable to abort the launch of a space gun in *Things to Come*, he never orders Theotocopulos to be suppressed, no matter how outspoken the latter's castigation of progress sounds. So long as the dissenters, such as Lychnis and Theotocopulos, are allowed to critique their respective societies, the crowd provides additional, albeit regressive, opportunities for free discussion. The fact that the crowd is brought back to life on film in *Men Like Gods* and in Theotocopulos's notebooks in *The Shape of Things to Come*, to say nothing of its active role in *Things to Come*, closely follows a contemporary England of ever changing susceptibilities that Wells proposes to acknowledge and re-educate.

## Conclusion

The conception of the Utopian double traverses Wells's long-term project of bettering humanity by social and biological means, and by balancing out challenges to individuality. Immersed in a properly managed and fully accessible system of education, the Utopian double's character is fostered in the tradition of fairness that springs from the national emphasis on fair play as an active strategy in the Englishman's life. Alongside eugenics, the

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<sup>55</sup> Cunningham, p. 339.

<sup>56</sup> Gary Cross and John K. Walton, *The Playful Crowd: Pleasure Places in the Twentieth Century*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), p. 256.

overhuman qualities of the Utopian double's physique and character equally signal Wells's steady interest in revitalizing the nation (and humanity at large). Having rejected *laissez-faire*, Wells invests individualism in the functional aspect of a progress-oriented World State. In depicting potential opposition to progress, he nevertheless designates the crowd as both a dissenting agency and a critical corrective to Utopian individualism. This ambivalence suggests Wells's underlying uncertainty about the forms in which residual attachments to England may be allowed to survive in a rational World State.

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