

H.G. Wells' Prophecy Of Anthropocene In The Time Machine

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This paper attempts to explore the impact of human activity on the Earth, a concept referred to as "The Anthropocene" in H.G. Wells' The Time Machine. These effects include changing climate patterns and environmental deterioration brought on by rising technological use and urbanisation. This paper examines Wells' vision of a far-off future characterised by stark social inequality and ecological catastrophe to highlight his foresight and warnings about the potential consequences of unchecked technological advancements and environmental neglect. This study demonstrates how Wells' writings remain relevant in the current discourse surrounding sustainability and the Anthropocene Epoch.

Keywords: Anthropocene Epoch, Climate Change, Ecological Catastrophe, Environmental Deterioration, Technological Advancements.

Introduction

Herbert George Wells, born in London on September 21, 1866, was a prolific English writer who penned over fifty novels and numerous short stories in diverse genres, including social commentary, politics, history, satire, and biography. He frequently expressed his opinions on the necessity of social and economic reforms. He belonged to the Victorian age when the Industrial Revolution was at its peak, so his works are mostly related to science and technology. He is well-known in the science fiction genre, and his works raise awareness of the consequences and impacts caused by humans' unchecked use of technology. He earned the title "The Father of Science Fiction" for his science fiction novels, often referred to as "Scientific Romances." Brian Aldiss referred to Wells as "The Shakespeare of Science Fiction," whereas Charles Fort designated him as "Wild Talent."

His debut novel, The Time Machine, published in 1895, narrates the adventure of a time traveller who invents a machine that allows one to travel through time and look into the future of humanity. Through this, he introduces "time" as a fourth dimension and possibilities of time travel. The time traveller explains his marvellous invention and demonstrates how it works to his visitors. After the guests leave, the time traveller travels through time. This novel is narrated in the first person and features two narrators: the narrator and the Time Traveller. The time traveller starts telling his story when he returns from his trip through time. He describes the transformation of the terrain during his journey. At last, he lands in the year Eight Hundred

and Two Thousand Seven Hundred and One A.D. (802701 A.D.). There, he finds two distinctive species: The Eloi (fragile like children) living in the upper world and the Morlocks (ape-like monsters) who live underground. The Morlocks steal the time machine; however, the time traveller gets back by fighting with the Morlocks. In fear of escaping, instead of reversing time to return to his own, he moves further into the future, where he finds climate change and no trace of life. So, he returns to his own time and concludes his narrative of his adventurous trip through time travel. The novel approaches its conclusion with no one believing the time traveller's claims; even the time traveller himself doubts them. With this confusion, all the guests leave, but when the narrator revisits the time traveller the next day, he is already getting ready to go on time travel again. The narrator concludes by noting that three years have passed without the Time Traveler's return, and he believes the Time Traveler may be living in a future where all problems have been solved. Overall, the nightmarish future that the time traveller discovers is quite different from what he had anticipated, giving rise to the concept of "The Anthropocene."

The Greek terms "Anthropo", which means "human", and "Cene", which means "new", are the sources of the phrase "Anthropocene." These words indicate "The Age of Humans," though the term's exact meaning remains unclear. Eugene F. Stoermer, a diatom researcher, and atmospheric chemist Paul J. Crutzen coined the term in the 1980s. In 2000, it became famous. Scientists have proposed the Anthropocene as a geological epoch that encompasses the period during which human activities have significantly influenced the planet's environment and geology. It might involve issues that affect the ecosystem, such as exploitation, environmental degradation, and climate change.

In an article titled "The Anthropocene: A Critical Exploitation" by Amelia Moore, gives the perception of the term "Anthropocene" by different people. She notes that the term "Anthropocene" is used in various contexts; it often refers to the profound ways in which humans are influencing the planet, life, and the future. She states it as follows:

For some of the authors the Anthropocene is a complex time period of accelerated, human-dominated global change, for others it is a specific narrative framing of contemporary life and the futures. For some it is a lens through which to view multispecies worlds in formation, for others it is a spatial and material manifestation of specific economic, scientific, and political practices.(1)

In another article titled "Romancing the Anthropocene: H.G. Wells and the Genre of the Future," Aaron Rosenberg says that humans play a vital role in bringing significant influence on the planet and are to be responsible for issues like extinction, overpopulation and climate change. He states it as follows:

Anthropocene: a term that conceptualizes the present as belonging to a new geologic epoch in which the human species emerges as a planetary agent, exposed to and broadly responsible for the megahazards this status entails-overpopulation, climate change, mass extinction; the sign under which inhuman scales start to look profoundly human after all.(81)

Overall, the Anthropocene symbolises the understanding that people have evolved into geological agents, permanently altering Earth's systems. One can examine how the novel *The Time Machine* utilizes the concept of the Anthropocene.

The novel tries to shed light on the profound impact of human activity on Earth, especially on the consequences of environmental deterioration and climatic changes, which come under the umbrella term "The Anthropocene". To maintain harmony between humanity and nature, ecological balance is crucial. In an article titled "An Introduction to Environmental Degradation: Causes, consequences and mitigation", Maurya et al. emphasize that environmental degradation is a worldwide crisis that includes a variety of interrelated issues such as pollution, deforestation global warming etc all of which contribute to the disruption of the ecological equilibrium of the planet they observe that:

Environmental degradation is a very serious problem worldwide which covers a variety of issues including pollution, biodiversity loss, and animal extinction, deforestation and desertification, global warming and a lot more.(2)

Environmental changes are presented in the novels when the time traveller travels with his machine. When he first operated his machine, not much changed, as he just travelled for seconds. However, when he did it for the second time, he observed the changes around him. Night and day came faster and faster. The trees grow the building rose, the Earth's surface changed, and the seasons changed from winter to spring in a minute. The time traveller, still travelling, was dumbfounded by the splendid architecture, larger than any building of his own time, and he saw rich hillsides.

The landscape was misty and vague. I was still on the hillside upon which this house now stands, and the shoulder rose above me, grey and dim. I saw trees growing and changing like puffs of vapour, now brown, now green; they grew, spread, shivered, and passed away. I saw huge buildings rise up faint and fair, and pass like dreams. The whole surface of the earth seemed changed - melting and flowing under my eyes.(21)

He ended up in the year 802,701 A.D. and began his exploration of the future world. He observed remarkable architecture. The buildings were gigantic, and extraordinarily massive in dimension. He did not find the beautiful bushes and flowers during his time. Until then, the future world appeared flawless to the time traveller; but the horror of this future unfolds as he encounters two unique species. Like the class distinctions during the Victorian period, this future world also had two distinct classes: the Eloi, who live on the surface, are frail, beautiful, and graceful creatures whose intellectual level is that of five-year-old children, and they have fragile features. In the upper world of Eloi, there were no traces of animals. Horses, cattle, sheep, and dogs were extinct. There were no small houses; apparently, single dwellings and households had vanished. The distinctive elements of the English setting, particularly houses and cottages, faded. There were close sexual resemblances and no evidence of contagious disease. There was no evidence of agriculture. One can improve one's favorite plants and

animals through selective breeding. According to Darwin's theory, the population has increased and become characterised by the survival of the fittest. There is no trace of machinery either. Apart from physical and environmental changes, there was also a tremendous social change. There were no signs of struggle, neither social nor economic.

On the other hand, the Morlocks, who are white ape-like monsters that live underground, are not like the Eloi. They use their intellect to create machines and work as labourers. However, as they lived underground, over the ages, they became cannibals and killed Eloi people for their food, having no humanity.

At first, proceeding from the problems of our own age, it seemed clear as daylight to me that the gradual widening of the present merely temporary and social difference between the capitalist and the labourer was the key to the whole position.(56)

Ultimately, the Eloi lead sophisticated lives while the Morlocks adapt to their labour conditions. At this stage, the time traveller witnesses civilisation's fall and humanity's decay.

The proverb "Necessity is the mother of invention" suggests that the Morlocks' need compels them to function as labourers, thereby granting them dominance over the Eloi, who, lacking necessity, experience a decline in intellectual capacity and ultimately become vulnerable to the Morlocks' predation. Meanwhile, the Morlocks steal the Time Traveller's machine, but he fights them and regains it. While escaping from the Morlocks in anxiety and fear, the time traveller moves further into the distant future instead of reversing time to return to his own era. It is a law of nature we overlook, that intellectual versatility is the compensation for change, danger, and trouble. An animal perfectly in harmony with its environment is a perfect mechanism. Nature never appeals to intelligence until habit and instinct are useless.(92)

He travelled thousands of millions of days and stopped on bleak moorland covered with sparse vegetation and thin snowflakes. It was noon, and the sun glowing intensely. The grand building had vanished. There were no traces of hills, trees, or rivers, but only plateaus. Only the plantigrade was present, and he observed a strange creature, comparing its characteristics to those of a centipede. He found no other insects, so he spent some time there. He still moved to the remote future, peeping into the more bottomless abyss of time. During his travels, he observed that the progression of day and night became increasingly slow and as did the sun's traversal across the sky, until they appeared to extend into millennia. Twilight brooded over the sky, indicating the sun had long since disappeared. All traces of the moon had vanished. The sun's heat was intolerable, and the sky had lost its blue color. The Northeast was inky black, and out of the blackness shone the stars. At first, the only trace of life he could find was the green vegetation seen on forest moss or lichens in caves. He was at the beach and saw a monstrous crab-like creature. He moved on a hundred years, and the same red sun was a little larger and duller. So he travelled a thousand more years. The sun expanded and dimmed in the western sky, as the energy of the ancient earth diminished. At last, after landing more than thirty million years later, he searched for traces of animal life that remained, but saw nothing moving.

Only the green slime on the rocks indicated that life had not become extinct. Only the sun had changed, and stars shone brightly. He realized that beyond these inanimate sounds, the universe was free of noise. As the darkness thickened, one by one, they vanished, and only the pale stars remained visible. All he could see was the hotness of the sun and the darkness, so in a panic, he sat on his time machine and returned to his own time.

In an article titled “The Future of Nature Prophesied in the Select Futuristic Science Fiction of H.G. Wells” by Malay Roy, he explains the last stage of Earth's geology that the time traveller discovers as follows:

The time traveller goes after 30 millions of years and discovers that there are only the last living things on the dying Earth. The world is covered in simple, lecherous vegetation. The rotation of the Earth gradually ceases. The Sun grows large, it comes nearer to earth, that is why the earth's crust has been demolished. (480)

To conclude, the novel *The Time Machine* not only explores the concept of time travel but also makes observations about the possible effects of human behavior on society and the environment. It aims to highlight the dangers of environmental degradation and the erosion of human intellect. The novel explores the theme currently associated with the Anthropocene. It also serves as a cautionary note regarding the impact of unchecked technological advancements, climate change, and environmental degradation. It raises readers' awareness of the importance of striking a balance between advancements, ecological protection, and social justice.

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