

**The flight from history:
from H G Wells to *Doctor Who* – and back again**

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Monsters have ceased to be news. There is never any shortage of horrible creatures who prey on human beings ... but examples of wise social planning are not so easy to find.

– Thomas More.¹

You spend all your time thinking about dying – like you're going to be killed by eggs or beef or global warming or asteroids. But you never take time to imagine the impossible. That maybe you survive.

– *Doctor Who*.²

This paper examines how, in the wake of 9/11, BBC Television's *Doctor Who* has symbolically explored that catastrophe and the efforts to construct a new world order in its aftermath. In doing so, it witnesses parallels with the apocalyptic and utopian visions of the programme's own greatest literary influence, the seminal science fiction of H G Wells.

It's not the end of the world

Political situations have often advertently paralleled and exploited those of fantasy space. Both John F. Kennedy and Ronald Reagan recognised the power of “science fiction” concepts (from NASA to SDI) as rallying cries during the Cold War – just as the Soviet authorities launched Tarkovsky’s *Solaris* (1972) as their response to Kubrick’s *2001* (1968) in a celluloid version of the space race. Hollywood imagineers feature today on the payroll of the Pentagon as creative professionals hired to envisage worst-case terror scenarios, and even Osama Bin Laden (known to be a fan of popular American culture)³ appears to have raided U.S. blockbusters for his ideas – he specifically seems to have been inspired in his apocalyptic plotting by Tom Clancy’s *Debt of Honour*,⁴ a story in which a terrorist crashes a civilian airliner into Washington.

Slavoj Žižek has written of the events of 9/11 as cinematic in their spectacular nature⁵ and Bin Laden’s particular debt to Clancy was acknowledged by CNN when, on 11 September 2001, the news station chose to interview the novelist as part of its coverage of the attacks on the World Trade Center. As Michael Gove wrote in *The Times* on 12 September 2001: “the scenario of a Tom Clancy thriller or Spielberg blockbuster was now unfolding live on the world’s television screens.”⁶ Indeed, the relationship between screen fantasy and the events of 9/11 was underlined, in the most extraordinary way, by the debut episode of Chris Carter’s *X-Files* spin-off, *The Lone Gunmen*, which in March 2001 had depicted a terrorist attempt to fly a hijacked airliner into the World Trade Center.

Just as history echoes science fiction, there has been a similarly strong reciprocal trend for science fiction to reflect contemporary historical situations. As far back as H G Wells’s *The War of the Worlds* (1898), we have witnessed science fiction’s expressions of urgent geopolitical angst – in this case, concerns over the sustainability of imperial hegemony: “The Tasmanians ... were entirely swept out of existence in a war of extermination waged by European immigrants ... Are we such apostles of mercy as to complain if the Martians warred in the same spirit?”⁷

Orson Welles’s 1938 radio adaptation of *The War of the Worlds* famously revisited Wells’s narrative to play upon contemporary anxieties about the imminence of world war, while Byron Haskin’s 1953 screen version saw Los Angeles devastated in an enactment of prevalent fears of Soviet invasion and nuclear holocaust. Half a century on, with its ravaged cities, crashed jets and underground alien terror cells, Steven Spielberg’s *War of the Worlds* (2005) has updated Haskin’s Cold War allegory as a fable of the War on Terror.

The scope of Spielberg's adaptation recalls Wells's insight that "this isn't a war ... It was never a war, any more than there's a war between men and ants."⁸ This is of course the reality of contemporary conflict. The current situation is one in which, as Howard Tumber and Frank Webster suggest, "militarily the USA is beyond challenge."⁹ This sense of disequilibrium has been palpable since the collapse of the Soviet superpower in the early 1990s – and indeed since the first Gulf War (1990-91), a conflict which, according to Jean Baudrillard, was "won in advance ... We will never know what an American taking part with a chance of being beaten would have been like."¹⁰ More recently, Aijaz Ahmad's depiction of the War on Terror has advanced uncanny echoes of Wells's interplanetary war: "Such is the asymmetry of power in our time: those who rule the universe shall be victorious against ... the most wretched of the earth."¹¹

Spielberg's humans start off as the victims of a surprise terror attack (like the people of New York in September 2001), but they end up as casualties of an invasion by forces whose technological superiority mirrors the overwhelming military imbalance, which characterises the War on Terror – and thus come to resemble the citizens (and insurgents) of Iraq. What goes around comes around: the imperial power becomes politically equivalent to its former Tasmanian subject. Indeed, when in Wells's original novel a shell-shocked artilleryman envisages a mode of underground guerrilla warfare against the alien invaders, the scenario closely anticipates by more than a century the resistance in occupied Iraq.¹²

Spielberg's film is one of several recent blockbusters that present the al-Qaeda attacks and the War on Terror as the defining topics of twenty-first century screen science fiction. Like *The Day After Tomorrow* (2004), *I Am Legend* (2007) and *Cloverfield* (2008), Spielberg's *War of the Worlds* depicts the destruction of the postmodern American metropolis. *Cloverfield* is particularly striking for the way in which its visual style (exclusively performed through the lens of a hand-held camcorder) recalls the shaky news footage of 11 September 2001.

Other films focus on the reactionary transformation of American society since 9/11. Set in Washington DC, Oliver Hirschbiegel's *The Invasion* (2007) revises the anti-Communist politics of Don Siegel's *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956) to imagine western pluralism transformed into a fundamentalist Utopia by forces which are at once alien and insidious: a world in which the violence of Iraq and Darfur are unknown – in which "there is no other" – and in which therefore "humans cease to be human."

Even Spielberg's *Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull* (2008) draws timely parallels between McCarthyism and contemporary American paranoia. Chris Carter's *The X-Files: I Want to Believe* (2008)

makes a related point when it self-consciously juxtaposes images of George W Bush and J Edgar Hoover, while James McTeigue's *V for Vendetta* (2006) envisages the Orwellian tyranny of a post-War-on-Terror Britain.

Recent superhero movies have also examined America's continuing moral crisis, most obviously the unambiguous depiction of the arms industry's exploitation of the War on Terror in Jon Favreau's *Iron Man* (2008). Heralded by a poster displaying a burning city skyscraper, Christopher Nolan's *The Dark Knight* (2008) advances a similarly problematic perspective upon the crusade against an uncompromising and irrational terrorism in its representation of the twilight Utopia of the vigilante – a state of emergency in which civil rights are suspended and one which, the film finally emphasises, must not be allowed to solidify into a new world order. Meanwhile, the opening of another comic-book adaptation, Tim Story's *Rise of the Silver Surfer* (2007), sees an alien strike cause an aircraft to crash into a Manhattan skyscraper. The film goes on to critique "extreme rendition": the torture of a terror suspect by U.S. agents at an isolated military base.

These films invoke apocalyptic concerns that have lain dormant since the end of the Cold War. Similar anxieties are discernible in the CBS television series *Jericho* (2006-08) and the BBC's *Spooks: Code 9* (2008), both set in the wake of nuclear terror attacks. Analogous end-of-civilization scenarios are witnessed in Danny Boyle's *28 Days Later* (2002) and Juan Carlos Fresnadillo's *28 Weeks Later* (2007) – the latter elaborating to address issues of U.S. military brutality in the failed reconstruction of an occupied zone, the consequent spread of rabid extremism and the eventual exportation of terror. These visions refer us back to the eschatological science fiction of the opening years of the Cold War: Richard Matheson's 1954 novel *I Am Legend*¹³ (which inspired film adaptations in 1964, 1971 and 2007) and John Wyndham's 1951 novel *The Day of the Triffids* (inspired by *The War of The Worlds*¹⁴ and adapted for cinema in 1962, and for television in 1981 and 2009). They also recall the BBC's *Survivors* (1975-77), another account of a post-apocalyptic world and remade in 2008 for a post-9/11 generation.

These fantastically cataclysmic tableaux are somewhat more optimistic than, say, the harsh realism of Nicholas Meyer's *The Day After* (1983) or Mick Jackson's *Threads* (1984). Like the Christian apocalypse itself, they delineate a purged world ripe for reconstruction: they represent, in Fredric Jameson's words, "a Utopian wish fulfilment wrapped in dystopian wolf's clothing."¹⁵ One recalls in this context Žižek's analysis of two of screen fiction's most celebrated responses to 9/11, Paul Greengrass's *United 93* (2006) and Oliver Stone's *World Trade Center* (2006): "they want to read

the 9/11 catastrophe as a blessing in disguise ... This utopian perspective is one of the undercurrents that sustain our fascination with disaster movies: it is as if our societies need a major catastrophe in order to resuscitate the spirit of community solidarity.”¹⁶ Jameson and Žižek’s interpretations expose a post-catastrophic utopianism which we might also observe in Tony Blair’s declaration to a Labour Party conference on 2 October 2001: “The kaleidoscope has been shaken. The pieces are in flux. Soon they will settle again. Before they do, let us re-order this world around us.”

Blair’s geopolitical opportunism anticipates the denouement of the Hollywood adaptation of Douglas Adams’s *The Hitch Hiker’s Guide to the Galaxy* (2005), which flourishes a utopian Earth built to replace the planet obliterated by the Vogon demolition fleet. This cathartic reconstructionism adheres to H G Wells’s argument in *The Shape of Things to Come* (1933), that:

without the sufferings of these generations men’s minds could never have been sufficiently purged of their obstinate loyalties, jealousies, fears and superstitions; men’s wills never roused to the efforts, disciplines and sacrifices that were demanded for the establishment of the Modern State.¹⁷

Wells’s Modern State is founded upon a century of war and plague, which annihilates half the human race.¹⁸ However, his totalitarian visionaries, like those neoconservatives bent upon building a new world order in the wake of 9/11, might do well to remember the eventual despair of Lionel Verney, the sole survivor of a world also ravaged by war and plague, an idealist who finally comes to recognise the futility of his own utopian ambitions, in Mary Shelley’s seminal work of apocalyptic science fiction, *The Last Man*: “I smile bitterly at the delusion I have so long nourished.”¹⁹

Much of the popular television fantasy and science fiction broadcast in the United States since 9/11 advances similarly problematic perspectives upon the imposition of a new world order. *Star Trek: Enterprise* (2001-2005), *Battlestar Galactica* (2003-2009) and *Heroes* (2006-) each in their different ways scrutinise human responses to sudden and devastating terror attacks upon the modern democratic metropolis.²⁰ Commensurate concerns can also be witnessed in BBC Television’s twenty-first century reinvention of its longest running science fiction series, *Doctor Who*.

Doctoring history

The BBC’s own history of British science fiction, *The Martians and Us* (2006), has argued that the original series of *Doctor Who* (1963-89) began

as an elaboration of H G Wells's *The Time Machine*.²¹ John Tulloch and Henry Jenkins similarly report that "the time-travelling idea for *Doctor Who*" originated in Wells;²² and Tulloch and Manuel Alvarado add that:

When in November 1963 the scientific but whimsical Doctor returned to his time machine for the first time, dressed as a turn-of-the-century gentleman, the salute to H G Wells' scientist/time traveller ... was appropriate ... *Doctor Who*, as its first producer said, was based 'more than loosely on *The Time Machine*.'²³

Indeed, the Doctor's first encounter with his arch-enemies, the Daleks, in 1963 (the tale of a post-apocalyptic conflict between effete pacifists and the subterranean monsters who prey on them) is very obviously modelled on *The Time Machine* – and perhaps more immediately on George Pal's 1960 screen adaptation of Wells's novel.²⁴

Upon the franchise's extraordinarily successful revival in 2005, the new *Doctor Who* seemed significantly less Wellsian in its accents and tone. It was self-consciously contemporary, set in a land of leather jackets, housing estates and New Labour politics, and overtly resolved upon "getting the tone right for the twenty-first century."²⁵ It has discussed illusory weapons of mass destruction in "World War Three" (2005), American hegemony in "The Christmas Invasion" (2005), "The Sound of Drums" (2007) and "Voyage of the Damned" (2007), and Guantanamo Bay in "The Sontaran Stratagem" (2008). Its lead writer, Russell T Davies, has proclaimed the programme's "anti-war message"²⁶ and has added that, although these attempts at "quick satire" may be "hardly profound," he believes that, for example, his reference to the weapons of mass destruction debate "satirises a politician on TV about needing a war; men have died for that, are dying now."²⁷ The programme's parodies of British politics have even been noted by the *Daily Telegraph*, among other newspapers, which recognised the similarity between Tony Blair and the show's arch-villain, the Master, who, in "The Sound of Drums" (2007), fools the British people into electing him Prime Minister.²⁸

Digitally remastered

By the start of the new series of *Doctor Who*, the protagonist's home planet has been annihilated in a final battle with the Daleks – the Time War. In an approach reminiscent of the blackout which accompanies footage of the attack on the World Trade Center at the opening of Michael Moore's *Fahrenheit 9/11* (2004), this catastrophe is never shown, as though its visual and emotional impact were too much for the eyes or for the screen.

In the programme's second episode, the Earth is also destroyed (in the far distant future), and in its second and third seasons the series depicts a reconstructed New Earth, and specifically (and aptly) the city of New New York. However, this New Earth is not the Utopia it appears (fleetingly) to be. On his first visit to New New York, the Doctor discovers a society whose health is sustained by the torture of an imprisoned underclass in a vivisectionist's version of Abu Ghraib; on his second visit, he finds the city ravaged by drug addiction and environmental pollution. Humanity's brave new world is a very poor sort of Utopia, a state of moral complacency and social decadence, a veritable *entropia*.

In "The Ark in Space" (1974), Tom Baker's Doctor had discovered the final survivors of humanity sheltering in a space station from solar flares, which had devastated the Earth. Baker declared:

Homo sapiens: what an inventive, invincible species. It's only a few million years since they crawled up out of the mud and learned to walk. Puny, defenceless bipeds. They've survived flood, famine and plague – they've survived cosmic wars and holocausts and now here they are, out among the stars, waiting to begin a new life, ready to outsit eternity. They're indomitable. Indomitable.

Thirty-three years later, in an episode entitled "Utopia" (2007), David Tennant's Doctor encounters a similar group of human survivors – this time at the very end of the universe. Tennant's words echo Baker's speech:

You survived. You might have spent a million years evolving into clouds of gas and another million as downloads, but you always revert to the basic human shape – the fundamental humans. The end of the universe and here you are – indomitable, that's the word – indomitable.

Yet this optimistic view of humanity's potentially utopian future is short-lived. In "The Christmas Invasion" (2005), when Britain's Prime Minister orders the destruction of a defeated alien invasion force, the Doctor's judgment of homo sapiens is significantly less positive: "That was murder ... I should have told them to run as fast as they can. Run and hide because the monsters are coming. The human race." In "Midnight" (2008), the paranoia which envelops a hijacked travelcraft does not evoke the heroism of the passengers of *United 93* (or, for that matter, of the ferry passengers in *The Dark Knight*) so much as the xenophobic hysteria of the UK's tabloid press, as the travelcraft's passengers, faced with an unseen threat, conspire to cast the programme's alien hero to his death: "He just turned up out of the blue ... like an immigrant ... he hasn't even told us his name ...

we should throw him out ... get rid of him now.” The following episode, “Turn Left” (2008), presents a dystopian alterity in which London has been destroyed by an alien strike – in a curious version of 9/11, a space liner has crashed into Buckingham Palace. The resulting state of emergency witnesses the triumph of a military authoritarianism, which leads inexorably towards the establishment of detention (or concentration) camps for immigrants: “Labour camps – that’s what they called them last time. It’s happening again.” The crisis results in a resurgence of racist nationalism: “It’s the new law. England for the English.”

In the first season of the regenerated *Doctor Who*, the humans of the two-hundredth millennium are enthralled to relentless rounds of reality television and game shows, while the losers from these programmes are harvested to breed new generations of robotic killers. The second season presents a vision of contemporary humanity enslaved to its mobile information and communications technologies, which ultimately convert (or “upgrade”) the species into another breed of killer robots. The third season depicts ordinary men, women and children at the end of the universe so desperate to survive the impending cataclysm that they download into cybernetic globes, which then return in time to devastate and occupy early twenty-first century Earth. This is, as the series terms it, our ultimate “Utopia.”

The latter apocalypse is deployed by the Doctor’s fellow Time Lord, a psychopathic villain known as the Master: he transforms present-day Earth into a slave empire controlled by murderous robot globes, which contain those remnants of the human race. The Master attempts to appropriate the protagonist’s role as the saviour of humankind, but his vision is technocratic and puritanical and his “Utopia” is a barren dystopia, a war-torn landscape reminiscent of other contemporary attempts to construct a new world order. The new series of *Doctor Who* constantly warns against the dangers of these philanthropic fundamentalists – from the Emperor of the Daleks, bent on building his own “heaven on earth” in “The Parting of the Ways” (2005), to John Lumic and Davros, the fanatically utopianist creators of the robotic Cybermen and the Daleks respectively.

Extreme renditions

This ostensibly benevolent tendency towards moral extremism represents the central problem of global politics today. Do we remain uncompromisingly faithful to our utopian ideals, or do we attempt to negotiate a pragmatic reconciliation with material history, a consensus mobilised to confront the current historical crisis, this clash of civilizations manifest in an absurd and endless conflict against an abstract concept? Caught between

idealism and pragmatism, we may recall Derrida's elaboration of this dichotomy:

Tragedy would leave this strange sense, a contingent one finally, that we must affirm and learn to love instead of dreaming of the innumerable ... But where would the dream of the innumerable come from if it is indeed a dream? Does not the dream itself prove that what is dreamt of must be there in order for it to provide the dream?²⁹

Is it the case that anti-utopian sensibilities themselves, as Fredric Jameson proposes, admit "some conviction as to the inevitability of Utopia"?³⁰ Or is Utopia, as Jameson also implies, practically impossible – insofar as "so radically different a society cannot even be imagined"?³¹

William Morris would not of course admit to the unreality of his utopian ambition: "if others can see it as I have seen it, then it may be called a vision rather than a dream."³² Edward Bellamy also refused to concede to contemporary reality. Towards the end of *Looking Backward*, his narrator wakes from his dream of a twentieth century Utopia and finds himself once more in the dystopian Boston of the nineteenth century. Yet a few pages later, he is roused from that nightmare to discover that his "return to the nineteenth century had been the dream, and [his] presence in the twentieth was the reality."³³

Faced, however, with the immensity and immediacy of humanity's capacity for self-destruction, Derrida, by contrast, eventually rejects an impossibly utopian idealism in favour of a rather more practicable approach. He suggests that the most exigent task of philosophy is "to postpone the uses of these weapons [of mass destruction] ... To make the conversation last."³⁴ Derrida sides with the pragmatics of affirmation: "deconstruction is always ... on the side of the affirmation of life."³⁵ From this position, he argues that "one must keep the discussion going" and that we might thereby "band together against both the politics of American hegemony ... and an Arab-Islamic theocracy."³⁶

Derrida declares that we must urgently now "learn to live."³⁷ Yet, as he adds, this imperative is not unproblematic. Who is it that teaches us to live, who conjures and commands this existential Utopia? And where therefore might this utopian desire tend? The irony is that in learning to live, we are all too often directed by the very extremist influences, which this strategy of pragmatic affirmation has renounced. In the competing voices which now seek to prescribe our ways of life, Derrida thus discerns "conflicts of culture and religion that are tearing apart ... the world ... Entire regiments of ghosts have returned ... camouflaged by ... the postmodern excess of

arms (information technology ... and so forth).”³⁸

These armoured techno-utopianists have found form in so many of science fiction’s prophecies, particularly in *Doctor Who*’s own “Army of Ghosts” (as it dubbed its legions of Cybermen in 2006) and the rest of its robotic and monstrous host. But the villains of the twenty-first century’s *Doctor Who* are not necessarily malevolent in themselves: they are impatient extremists who refuse to compromise their quests for perfection. Perhaps the most striking of these figures is Davros, the creator of the Daleks, who in “Journey’s End” (2008) attempts to obliterate the universe in order to attain his vision of heaven:

Structure falls apart ... People and planets and stars will become dust, and the dust will become atoms, and the atoms will become nothing ... This is my ultimate victory ... the destruction of reality itself.

Yet since his first appearance in the series in “Genesis of the Daleks” (1975), Davros has stressed that his ambition, though uncompromising, is ultimately benevolent:

When all other life forms are suppressed, when the Daleks are the supreme rulers of the universe, then you will have peace. Wars will end. They are the power not of evil but of good.

Where I find my heaven

Unlike Davros and the Master, the Doctor – the self-styled healer – understands that the process of reaching a sustainable and sustaining peace is both time-consuming and traumatic. The possibility of a better future does not (like a crusade or a jihad) involve the projection of an illusory past or the eradication of the historical present. In his twenty-first century incarnations, the Doctor no longer solves the problems of the universe so much as he allows those individuals he encounters to see that they hold the solutions within themselves. This pluralist approach eschews the interventionist polarizations which destroyed his civilization – and which, for that matter, may yet destroy our own.

This is a critical and kinetic utopianism redolent of Tom Moylan’s model of a “self-reflexive and deconstructive” idealism,³⁹ and one which also returns us to a Wellsian design: “the Modern Utopia ... must shape not as a permanent state but as a hopeful stage leading to a long ascent of stages.”⁴⁰ As envisaged in *A Modern Utopia* (1905), Wells’s perfect world does not attempt to “change the nature of man.”⁴¹ In this respect, it differs fundamentally from the Utopia of the Cybermen, the Daleks or the Master –

and, as Wells emphasises, from that of William Morris and other classical utopianists.⁴² Wells argues that the Morean or Platonic imposition upon individuals of a totalizing schematization – what George Orwell characterises as the wish to “freeze history”⁴³ – creates an unsustainably monologicistic realm. Wells’s *Utopia* does not negate the past, it embraces and consolidates the dialectical process: “Utopia too must have a history.”⁴⁴ Like the Doctor and Derrida, Wells promotes the prospect of “a flexible common compromise.”⁴⁵ He specifically offers his *Utopia* as an “effectual conclusion” to the controversies between leftism and individualism⁴⁶ – to the likes of Lenin’s insistence upon the “antithesis ... between liberalism and socialism.”⁴⁷ It may be that this reconciliatory pragmatism proves more effective than any amount of unbending idealism.

What remains, then, is a *Utopia*, which is resolutely material, historical and dialogical, not the perfected state of fundamentalism, but the aspirant condition of a critical humanism. This Wellsian *Utopia* “is not to be a unanimous world any more, it is to have all and more of the mental contrariety we find in the world of the real.”⁴⁸ Perhaps Samuel Butler’s mock-utopian vision was not so far off the mark after all. Butler wrote of his Erewhonians that “when they profess themselves to be quite certain about any matter, and avow it as a base on which they are to build a system of practice, they seldom quite believe in it.”⁴⁹ It may be that this is the most sustainably utopian (or heterotopian) perspective of all.

In approaching the possibility of this heteroglossic utopianism, it seems pertinent to invoke the dialogical paradigms of Mikhail Bakhtin. Bakhtin proposes the potential suspension of diametrically opposite positions within the notion of an “active-dialogic understanding” – the possibility of an “infinite and unfinalized dialogue in which no meaning dies.”⁵⁰ Bakhtin’s dialogical imaginary is at once anachronistic and profoundly historical: it transcends individual contemporaneity to propose an interactive structuration of histories and times. The architectonics, which mediates between the individual and the historical – this “unity of answerability”⁵¹ – represents an organic, dynamic and discursive time machine. This process transforms the text into one “capable of uncovering in each era and against ever new dialogizing backgrounds ever newer aspects of meaning; [its] semantic content literally continues to grow, to further create out of itself.”⁵² Bakhtin’s dialogical model articulates a textual progressivism, which offers, in its deconstructive negotiation of contraries, to regenerate the static pseudo-utopianism of his own formalistic and totalitarian environment.

Indeed, despite Wells’s implications as to the totalizing nature of Thomas More’s own *Utopia*, we may see hints of this self-deconstructive, critical utopianism in More’s original. More’s *Utopia* exposes the ambiguities

and impossibilities of its own idealizations. Its promised land is both a *terra incognita* and a *terra nullius* – a no-place of *Ademus* – “Nopeople” – and of *Achoriorum populus*, the people of “Nolandia.”⁵³ More’s *Utopia* is hardly, in the popular and simplistic sense, utopian at all: it may be the prototype of Utopia, but it is hardly its stereotype.

Fredric Jameson defines the meta-Utopian as including “both the Utopia and its generic adversary.”⁵⁴ Tom Moylan identifies within a comparable mode of “self-critical utopian discourse”, the potential for “a process that can tear apart the dominant ideological web.”⁵⁵ One might enquire, in this context, whether Thomas More’s own apparent utopianism does not immanently resolve itself, or fail to resolve itself, into a similar set of practices. More himself challenges the condition of his Utopian citizens by announcing “the grand absurdity on which their whole society was based.”⁵⁶ More’s satire upon Utopia occupies precisely the same textual space (which is therefore a metatextual space, a paradoxical and impossible space, a no-place), as does the satire upon his own socio-political reality, which that *Utopia/Utopia* represents. It is through this self-problematizing praxis (and its implicit and essential rejection of autarchy) that More offers the possibility of Moylan’s critical Utopia: “a seditious expression of social change [...] in a permanently open process of envisaging what is not yet.”⁵⁷

If the utopian impulse breaks down upon its contact with material history, then perhaps by inscribing – and, more importantly, integrating – its antithesis and its own absurdity within itself (as indeed, by the argument of its first part, More’s *Utopia* literally does), it might achieve a balance and a self-awareness sufficient to sustain it beyond the moment of its conception, the revolutionary or revelatory moment, and to translate its abstraction into the very physical placedness (the historical reality) which it had denied itself and which had threatened to extinguish it. It is only through dialogue with itself, its contraries and its contexts that the utopian impulse can hope to contextualise itself into existence.

Bad omens

Published four years before *A Modern Utopia*, H G Wells’s *Anticipations* (1901) advances a much harsher perspective upon the future. *Anticipations* predicts that the end of the twentieth century would witness the rise of “a naturally and informally organized, educated class ... a New Republic dominating the world.”⁵⁸ Wells’s New Republic is no frozen Utopia: its founders “will not conceive of it as a millennial paradise, a blissful inconsequent stagnation, but as a world state of active ... human beings.”⁵⁹ Yet this dynamic futurity seems starkly less heterogeneous than Wells’s *Modern Uto-*

pia: his New Republic's approaches to the uneducable classes range from the eugenicist through to the genocidal:

To make life convenient for the breeding of such people will seem ... an exceedingly abominable proceeding ... [The New Republicans] will ... where the whole tenor of a man's actions ... seems to prove him unfitted for free life in the world ... remove him from being ... [The New Republic] will tolerate no dark corners where the people of the Abyss may fester ... those swarms of black, and brown, and dirty-white, and yellow people, who do not come into the new needs of efficiency ... it is their portion to die out and disappear.⁶⁰

These *Anticipations* in many ways anticipate the unsentimental vision of the process of the establishment of the hegemonic and homogeneous Modern State, which Wells presents in *The Shape of Things to Come*, portraying the apparent inevitability of the violent, uncompromising and totalizing imposition of a perfected, absolutist state: "the new government meant to rule not only the planet but the human will. One thing meant the other ... There was now to be one faith only in the world, the moral expression of the one world community."⁶¹ This "pitilessly benevolent" and "oppressively puritanical" regime declares that "the world is still full of misleading doctrines ... and it is the duty of government to erase these ... We have to get a common vision of existence ... established throughout the whole population of the world, and *speedily*."⁶² In today's terms, Wells's state seeks to win the hearts and minds of the people – through shock and awe.

In *Things to Come* (1936), William Cameron Menzies's less-than-faithful film adaptation of Wells's text, a similar perspective is advanced by the new world order's dictator, a leader whose absolutist vision of a future of endless struggle allows no room for compromise: "for Man no rest and no ending – he must go on – conquest beyond conquest ... all the universe or nothingness." This ambition anticipates George W. Bush's uncompromising proclamation of his own relentless crusade in his address to Congress on 20 September 2001:

Our war on terror ... will not end until every terrorist group of global reach has been found, stopped and defeated ... Every nation, in every region, now has a decision to make. Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists.

At once contradicting and reinforcing his own (already inherently absurd) message, the President added that this mission was "a task that does not end."

The Krillitane leader in *Doctor Who*'s "School Reunion" (2006) repre-

sents a remarkably similar mode of ludicrously benevolent tyranny – a transformative power that he offers to share with the Doctor:

Reality becomes clay in our hands. We can shape the universe – and improve it ... Think of the changes that could be made if this power was used for good ... Become a god at my side. Think of the civilisations you could save ... your own people ... the Time Lords reborn. Imagine what you could do.

The Krillitane's position draws upon a strand of uncompromising utopianism, which leads from the Enlightenment into the French Revolution (from Rousseau to Robespierre) and towards the imposition of an intellectual elite's social contract in the utopianism of modernity – the kind of industrial and technological societal construct foreseen by Wells's *Anticipations* and by his *Modern Utopia*. Postmodernism responds to this monological vision with its emphasis upon the possibilities of a pluralistic, dialogical mode of utopianism, one able to deconstruct its own totalizing trends. The absolutist grand narratives represented by such attempts to enforce new world orders as those of American neoconservatism or Islamic fundamentalism may be countered by the arguments in favour of dialogue, reconciliation and compromise attempted by figures as (fittingly) diverse as Mikhail Bakhtin, Jacques Derrida, Russell T Davies and Barack Obama. The tensions between these polarizing and pluralist impulses not only represent (as Fredric Jameson and Tom Moylan demonstrate) a critical point within the history of utopian theory, they also articulate a crucial debate for our times.

Conclusion

At the end of *The Shape of Things to Come*, H G Wells proposes a model for utopian desire, which transcends William Morris's dichotomy between the fantastical dream and the prophetic vision:

If this is neither a dream book nor a Sybilline history, then it is a theory of world revolution. Plainly the thesis is that history must now continue to be a string of accidents with an increasingly disastrous trend until a comprehensive faith in the modernized World-State ... takes hold of the human imagination.⁶³

Wells's text has warned against an aggressive and proscriptive brand of utopianism: like Derrida, he argues instead in favour of a school of theory which narrates and elucidates historical processes, an ongoing and ameliorative dialogue between the contemporary situation and possibilities of futurity. In an era of impetuous ideological polarisations, we might benefit from

this sense of radical patience. As the twenty-first century incarnation of *Doctor Who* also reminds us, the transformation of the universe can only be sustainable if it embraces difference and change. This is not a sudden, violent or totalizing mode of redemption: it is the slow yet eternally dynamic process of individual salvation and self-sacrifice.

In his epilogue to *The Time Machine* (1895), however, Wells offers a starker view of humanity's prospects. He has already portrayed a world in which the class struggle has led to the evolution of a degenerate cannibalistic subspecies of *homo sapiens*. His Time Traveller journeys even further into the future, to the very end of the Earth, but finds nothing to counter this pessimistic perspective:

He ... thought but cheerlessly of the Advancement of Mankind, and saw in the growing pile of civilization only a foolish heaping that must inevitably fall back upon and destroy its creators in the end.⁶⁴

Doctor Who to some extent maintains the chance of a future ripe with more positive possibilities. But it does so not by declaring the inevitability of a specific Utopia (as the Master, the Krillitanes, the Daleks, the Cybermen and Wells's Modern State and New Republic do), but, like *A Modern Utopia*, precisely by delineating the impossibility and undesirability of a classically, stereotypically and homogeneously perfect state.

The utopianist cannot after all enter her promised land. The attainment of perfection annihilates utopian desire – not because it satisfies that desire, but because it cannot. Utopian citizens themselves – citizens of a frozen, total Utopia – lack the utopian dynamic. They neither dream nor hope. Perhaps those who struggle towards that perfection have the better end of the deal. As Albert Camus suggests at the close of *The Myth of Sisyphus*, “the struggle itself towards the heights is enough to fill a man's heart. We must imagine Sisyphus happy.”⁶⁵

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NOTES

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³ See Kola Boof, *Diary of a Lost Girl* (California: Door of Kush Multimedia, 2006).

⁴ Tom Clancy, *Debt of Honour* (London: HarperCollins, 1994).

- ⁵ Slavoj Žižek, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real!* (London: Verso Books, 2002) 15.
- ⁶ Michael Gove, "America wakes to terrorism by timetable – and the darkest national catastrophe," *The Times*, 12 September 2001.
- ⁷ H G Wells, *The War of the Worlds* (London: Penguin, 2005) 9.
- ⁸ Wells, *The War of the Worlds* 152.
- ⁹ Howard Tumber and Frank Webster, *Journalists Under Fire* (London: Sage, 2006) 49.
- ¹⁰ Jean Baudrillard, *The Gulf War Did Not Take Place*, trans Paul Patton (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1995) 61.
- ¹¹ Aijaz Ahmad, "Contextualizing conflict: the U.S. 'war on terrorism'" in *War and the Media*, eds Daya Kishan Thussu and Des Freedman (London: Sage, 2003) 19.
- ¹² Wells, *The War of the Worlds* 157-8.
- ¹³ Richard Matheson, *I Am Legend* (London: Gollancz, 1999).
- ¹⁴ See Barry Langford, "Introduction" in John Wyndham, *The Day of the Triffids* (London: Penguin, 2000) viii.
- ¹⁵ Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (London: Verso, 1991) 384.
- ¹⁶ Slavoj Žižek, *Violence* (London: Profile Books, 2008) 155.
- ¹⁷ H G Wells, *The Shape of Things to Come* (London: Penguin, 2005) 141.
- ¹⁸ Wells, *The Shape of Things to Come* 228.
- ¹⁹ Mary Shelley, *The Last Man* (London: Hogarth, 1985) 340.
- ²⁰ See Alec Charles, "War without End?: Utopia, the Family, and the Post-9/11 World in Russell T Davies' *Doctor Who*," *Science Fiction Studies* 35:3 (2008) 450-65.
- ²¹ Rachel Bell (producer), *The Martians and Us*, Episode 1, "From Apes to Aliens," Blast Films/BBC Four, 13 November 2006.
- ²² John Tulloch and Henry Jenkins, *Science Fiction Audiences* (London: Routledge, 1995) 51.
- ²³ John Tulloch and Manuel Alvarado, *Doctor Who – The Unfolding Text* (London: Macmillan, 1983) 121.
- ²⁴ *Doctor Who's* debt to Wells was eventually explicitly acknowledged in its 1985 story "Timelash," in which a young H G Wells enters into an adventure highly reminiscent of *The Time Machine*.
- ²⁵ Gary Russell, *Doctor Who: The Inside Story* (London: BBC Books, 2006) 20.
- ²⁶ Ciar Byrne, "Dr Who saves the Earth (and joins the protests against the war in Iraq)," *The Independent*, 13 December 2005.
- ²⁷ Russell T Davies, *The Writer's Tale* (London: BBC Books, 2008) 36.
- ²⁸ Jim White, "Did *Doctor Who* do it for you?," *The Daily Telegraph*, 2 July 2007.
- ²⁹ Jacques Derrida, "Choreographies" (interview with Christie V. McDonald), *Diacritics* 12:2 (1982) 76.

- ³⁰ Fredric Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future* (London: Verso, 2007) 201.
- ³¹ Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future* 142.
- ³² William Morris, *News from Nowhere* (London: Penguin, 1962) 301.
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- ³⁶ Derrida, *Learning to Live Finally* 29, 41.
- ³⁷ Derrida, *Learning to Live Finally*, 23-4; Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, trans Peggy Kamuf (New York: Routledge, 2006) xvi.
- ³⁸ Derrida, *Specters of Marx* 100.
- ³⁹ Tom Moylan, *Demand the Impossible: Science Fiction and the Utopian Imagination*. (London: Methuen, 1986) 213.
- ⁴⁰ H G Wells, *A Modern Utopia* (London: Penguin, 2005) 11.
- ⁴¹ Wells, *A Modern Utopia* 12.
- ⁴² Wells, *A Modern Utopia* 12.
- ⁴³ George Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (London: Penguin, 1954) 172.
- ⁴⁴ Wells, *A Modern Utopia* 81.
- ⁴⁵ Wells, *A Modern Utopia* 11.
- ⁴⁶ Wells, *A Modern Utopia* 64.
- ⁴⁷ V I Lenin, *What is to be Done?*, trans Robert Service (London: Penguin, 1989) 75.
- ⁴⁸ Wells, *A Modern Utopia* 87.
- ⁴⁹ Samuel Butler, *Erewhon* (London: Penguin, 1985) 162.
- ⁵⁰ M M Bakhtin, *Speech Genres & Other Late Essays*, trans Vern W McGee (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990) 159, 169.
- ⁵¹ M M Bakhtin, *Art and Answerability*, trans Vadim Liapunov (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986) 1.
- ⁵² M M Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, trans Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981) 421.
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- ⁵⁴ Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future* 177.
- ⁵⁵ Moylan, *Demand the Impossible* 213.
- ⁵⁶ More, *Utopia* 132.
- ⁵⁷ Moylan, *Demand the Impossible* 213.
- ⁵⁸ H G Wells, *Anticipations* (Charleston: BiblioBazaar, 2007) 163.
- ⁵⁹ Wells, *Anticipations* 182.

⁶⁰ Wells, *Anticipations* 183-194.

⁶¹ Wells, *The Shape of Things to Come* 346-7.

⁶² Wells, *The Shape of Things to Come* 361, 415, 366.

⁶³ Wells, *The Shape of Things to Come* 446.

⁶⁴ H G Wells, *The Time Machine* (London: Penguin, 2007) 91.

⁶⁵ Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, trans. Justin O'Brien (London: Penguin, 1988) 111.