

“When men think they are like gods they are usually much less than men being conceited fools”. (D. H. Lawrence, “Men Like Gods”)

In a letter to Eileen Garrett, dated 14 April 1962, Huxley refers to a forthcoming talk in New York at the American Academy of Arts and Letters and the National Institute of Arts and Letters, scheduled for 24 May¹. Apparently he was part of the "distinguished gathering of authors, artists and composers"² honored by the two affiliated societies. His address, published in the following year, consists of two parts: the first deals with the genesis of *Brave New World* as a parody of *Men Like Gods*; the longer second part classifies the various types of literary utopia, and serves to remind us of Huxley's wide reading and life-long interest in the genre.

One might be surprised to see, in the first sentence of the essay, that Huxley incorrectly refers to the publication date of *Men Like Gods* as 1930, fully seven years after it had appeared. Now, despite Huxley's assertion above that he started *Brave New World* as a direct satiric reply to *Men Like Gods*, and notwithstanding George Orwell's convincing suggestion that the parodic source of both *Brave New World* and his own *Coming up for Air* (1939) was Wells's 1923 utopia "of enlightened sunbathers whose sole topic of conversation is their own superiority to their ancestors,"³ surely Huxley's slip is solid enough basis for the speculation that he did not limit himself to *Men Like Gods* for inspiration. Indeed, in neither of the two letters of 1931 in which Huxley refers to the composition of his novel does he specifically mention *Men Like Gods*; instead he refers to "the horror of the Wellsian utopia" in the first, and "the appallingness of Utopia" in the other⁴. Scholars such as Meckier, Hillegas, and Firchow have cast the net of Huxley's Wellsian sources widely enough to include at least *When the Sleeper Wakes*, *First Men in the Moon*, *A Modern Utopia*, *The World of William Clissold*, and *The Open Conspiracy*. However, no one has yet discussed Wells's novel *The Autocracy of Mr. Parham* as a possible source for Huxley's best known novel. Interestingly, it appeared in 1930, the same year Huxley says he "resolved to write [the] derisive parody"⁵ of Wells. Huxley's name even appears in the third chapter of *Parham*. As in Huxley's play, *The World of Light* (1931), a seance figures significantly in the plot, and, in fact, becomes the device for the utopian dream shared by Parham and Sir Bussy Woodcock—yet another Wellsian caricature of Lord Beaverbrook.

In 1929 Wells had written in *The Realist*, a short-lived journal largely underwritten by Sir Alfred Mond, Lord Melchett, a virtual open letter, directed to Lords Melchett and Beaverbrook, critical of their attempts to create a tariff-protected, autarkic British Empire, thereby abandoning the internationalism of the *Open Conspiracy*.⁶ Wells's utopian-dystopian fantasy *The Autocracy of Mr. Parham* depicts the confrontation of an avowedly Fascistic would-be dictator (Parham/Lord Paramount) and a Liberal-Fascist faction of open conspirators led by Sir Bussy Woodcock (Beaverbrook) and Camelford, the Mond-like director of the imaginary rationalized multinational chemicals firm based on Brunner-Mond (later ICI) that also appears in *The World of William Clissold* (1926) and *After Democracy* (1932), namely Romer, Steinhart and Crest.⁷ The latter group triumphs

¹ *Letters of Aldous Huxley*, ed. Grover Smith (New York, 1969), 933. Hereafter, *Letters*.

² "Academies' Prize Attacked by Poet," *New York Times* (25 May 1962), 35:1.

³ George Orwell, *The Road to Wigan Pier* (London: 1937, rpt. 1963), 178.

⁴ *Letters*, 348, 351.

⁵ Huxley, "Utopias, Positive and Negative", 1.

⁶ See H.G. Wells, "Imperialism, the Open Conspiracy, Lord Melchett and Lord Beaverbrook," *The Realist* (Sept. 1929), 3-13.

⁷ The term "Liberal-Fascist" is Wells's coinage. At roughly the same time that

Huxley lamented the "dilatatory habits of parliamentarism" and described "industry, commerce, finance, agriculture" as "hide-bound" in his 1931 essay "Victory of Art over Humanity," Wells was addressing the 1931 Liberal summer school conference calling for an organization "to replace the dilatatory indecisiveness of parliamentary control. [...] I am asking for a Liberal Fascist [sic]." His speech was reprinted in: *After Democracy* (London, 1932), see pp. 24-28 for Wells's definition of Liberal-Fascism. Mustapha Mond's history lesson centers on the damage sustained by liberalism as a result of the economic crisis of 1930-31, "the great Economic Collapse" referred to in chapter 3 of *Brave New World*. Surely Wells's "open conspiracy" novels from *Clissold* to *Parham* bear more pertinently upon the economics of this chapter than *Men Like Gods*. In this context, leftist critic D. M. Mirsky argued that, after 1929, liberalism was replaced by organized capitalism. He linked Huxley and Wells as part of "the liberal intelligentsia [which] lowered itself to the

and appears ready to create the Wellsian world state until the scaffolding of the novel's plot collapses, and the reader returns to the starting point—the slump-ridden England of Ramsay MacDonald's National Government. Although Huxley had been something of a Wellsian open conspirator in the period immediately before the composition of *Brave New World*, he certainly did not share Wells's Pelagianism. Rather than deny original sin as Wells so pointedly does in *A Modern Utopia* (1905) and again in *Meanwhile* (1927),⁸ Huxley twice refers to original sin in his "Utopias, Positive and Negative." In fact, in one of his Hearst essays, Huxley criticizes the facile optimism of those prophets who "believe that a hundred years hence our descendants will be living in a Wellsian paradise," adding that the future paradisaical golden dream might as easily become a nightmare.⁹ This fundamental critique of Wellsian optimism reappears in *Ape and Essence* (1948). The nightmare originates in the original sin of oversimplification, or as the narrator of *Ape and Essence* puts it: "[...] Plato's God [is] forever mathematizing chaos into the order and beauty of art. But from the Parthenon and the *Timaeus* a specious logic leads to the tyranny which, in the *Republic*, is held up as the ideal form of government...."¹⁰ He goes on to accuse Utopians of the Left and Right of simplifying, abstracting, eliminating "all that, for their purposes, is irrelevant." And the result of their foolish consistency is forced labor, state propaganda, and the murder of Ghandi. "The dream of order begets tyranny" (*AE*, 7). The point Huxley made in 1948 he reiterates in his essay on Goya, quoting a caption from the *Caprichos*: "'The dream of reason produces monsters,'"¹¹ and again in his 1962 talk. It is well to remember that Huxley's favorite aphorism, judging by the number of times he committed the ironic words to paper, was, "Man proposes; God disposes." Wells, to use Huxley's term, was a "near-in Utopist tak[ing] himself seriously as legislator, sociologist and statesman," whose proud Baconian rhetoric, especially as Huxley remembered it in that quintessential Wellsian utopia, *Men Like Gods*, never failed to draw from Huxley a cautionary Augustinian counterblast, perhaps most vehemently in *Ape and Essence*: Progress—the theory that you can get something for nothing, the theory that you can gain in one field without paying for your gain in another, [...] that you alone understand the meaning of history, [...] that you can foresee all the consequences of your present actions, that Utopia lies just ahead and that, since ideal ends justify the most abominable means, it is your [...] duty to rob, swindle, torture, enslave and murder all those who [...] obstruct the onward march to the earthly paradise (*AE*, 93-94).

Thirty years later, Huxley may have remembered the Laurentian pensee which serves as an epigraph to this afterword. Certainly a consistent theme runs through Huxley's utopian writings from *Brave New World*, through *Ape and Essence*, *Themes and Variations*, through the utopian essay, "Ozymandias, the Utopia that Failed," through his essays in *Vedanta for the Western World*, and his last novel, *Island*. In them all he echoes Lawrence's dismay at humanity's pride in self-sufficiency:

When we think presumptuously that we are or shall become in some future utopian state men like gods, then in fact we are in mortal danger of becoming devils, capable only (however exalted our ideals may be, however beautifully worked out our plans and blueprints) of ruining our world and destroying ourselves.¹²

function of open, conscious functionaries for the protection of capitalism. [...] And large influential sections of the engineering and scientific intelligentsia kept their optimism by transferring it from 'socialism' and democratic strivings to organized capitalism—to the function of an oligarchy of 'enlightened' capitalists. A preponderating part of these people accepted the doctrines of Ford and Mond (Mondism) as the very last word for the progressive leaders of civilisation. Wells became one of the principal currents of the fasciation of the intelligentsia of Great Britain" (Mirsky, *The Intelligentsia of Great Britain* [New York, 1935] 34.

⁸ See *A Modern Utopia* (London, 1905), 299; *Meanwhile* (London, 1927), 33.

⁹ "One Hundred Years Hence," *Aldous Huxley's Hearst Essays*, ed. James Sexton (New York 1994), 281.

¹⁰ *Ape and Essence*, London 1948), 5. Hereafter, *AE*.

¹¹ *Themes and Variations* (London, 1950), 215.

¹² "Man and Reality," *Vedanta for the Western World* (London, 1948), 275.