# Fact or Fiction

People have always tried to predict the future. Whether it was with crystal balls, reading of the palms, or even looking at tea leaves, people have always had a natural curiosity towards precognition. In history, many people have always looked to the past to determine the outcomes of the future. In science fiction, H.G. Wells and Walter Miller Jr. analyzed the present to create warnings for the future. While many people have not been successful in their predictions, I believe that Miller and Wells were able to give others an accurate assumption of how the future would be. Through the use of symbolism, allusion, and historical elements, these stories ensnare the reader by creating a seamless science fiction plot while that accurately analyzes the current time period as well as giving a very reasonable prediction of the possible future.

Science fiction during the time period that these two stories were written was interesting, while most might assume that science fiction has always been simply, fiction, in the early years it was created to represent the past, present, or possible future. Science fiction can also be defined as a “historical happening” (Franklin P.3), it transcends literature, movies, graphic art, comic books, radio shows, and video games with ease while simultaneously delivering the message they want to convey.

While it is apparent that these writers cannot actually see into the future, what these men are able to do is greatly influence the future. The task of science fiction in history is not to accurately predict the future, it is to “make the reader contemplate possible futures,” (Gunn 2014 P.2). Many writers have pursued this goal of creating these dystopian futures in order to inform readers that this is a likely future if they continue down the dangerous path which they are on.

This is what H.G. Wells did with his story. In When the Sleeper Wakes, H.G. Wells transports the reader into a futuristic setting where Graham awakes and finds himself to somehow own a majority of all the industries in the world. This is a reference to the growth of capitalism from as early as the industrial age as well a prediction to what might come in the future. Wells was able to predict the rise of robber barons, or “Titans of Industry” as they prefer to be known as. Which truly envelopes the purpose of science fiction. Wells captured the past while predicting the future in order to deliver a message to us in the present. I believe that his message was to warn us of what our future might look like. Wells predicted the rapid industrialization of the U.S. as well as the corruption that would come along with it.

While science fiction can be used to analyze the past and influence the future, it also has many other purposes. Science fiction in history is also used to spark an imaginative fire in readers who have vast technical knowledge and experience to help realize their potential. In his book “*From Earth to the moon,* “Jules Verne proposed the idea of light-propelled spaceships which caused scientists from all over the world to start actively working on solar sails.” (Gunn 2014 P.5).

In “*When the Sleeper Wakes”,* Wells predicted that there would be small, cylindrical shaped devices that we could watch shows on, which is now what we know as Television. Science fictions’ role in innovation is so large, government agencies often hire people known as “Futurists” (TedED 2016), to help predict future innovations that can benefit the public by analyzing science fiction stories and implementing similar technologies used in these stories into real-life devices. Several of these innovations have already been created, such as synthetically made organs, online digital libraries, and even birth control pills. Without science fiction, we would only have a fraction of the technology that we do now. Due to this reason, I believe that science fiction plays an imperative role for not only the present, but for the future.

All science fiction stories are created with a purpose. For H.G. Wells, that purpose was to inform others of the danger that he saw rapidly approaching, for Walter Miller, it was to inform the public of a mistake they were already making. Miller wrote “*Let My People Go”* in order to convey a message to the people from his time period, (1952). However, Millers’ message prevailed for nearly one-hundred years. The issues that Miller saw in 1952 are still present even today.

In “Let My People Go” Miller starts the story with a direct message to the reader in order to avoid misinterpretation of his message and overall theme. He states, “How can we possibly amount to much when our fathers were sold at auction a scant five thousand years ago?” (Miller 1952 P.1). While it can be determined that he is referencing the story about to be told, his message applies to real life. How can we amount to much when our fathers were sold at auction not 100 years before the story was written?

Even if Miller was not personally affected by the racism, it was still a controversial issue across the nation because, at the time, racism was a common practice in the United States, because of this, the American People felt extremely divided. In fact, there were laws in place to make sure of it. Racism was still a big issue because of the “auctions” that occurred one-hundred years ago. People during this time believed that they were worth more or less than someone based off of their skin color.

Miller believed that this was an atrocity, he explained in his story that people should be treated equally no matter their “species” (Miller). I believe that Miller used the contrast of humans and aliens in order to create a similarity between the story and the current time period, as people were treating African Americans as aliens from another planet. Miller delivers a heartwarming message in this story about how we need to love each other in every “human form.” This in my personal opinion is directed at the millions of Americans that felt a distain for one another. Miller believed that we are all human, and we are all one, so why should we attempt to change that.

While many people may argue that science fictions’ influence on the future is merely a coincidence, there are several highly-credible sources that would disagree. Eileen Gunn stated that “science fiction is the important literature genre” (Gunn 2014 P.6). In fact, major companies such as Microsoft, Google, and Apple have all sponsored lecture series in which science fiction writers deliver motivation and insight to their employees and developers in order to help them stay ahead of the curve when it comes to innovation.

Science fiction also plays an important role in society; for example, “*1984.”* George Orwell could not have possibly known that the intrusion of technology that he predicted in “*1984”* was going to become a reality. However, he analyzed the exponential growth of technology in everyday life and made the assumption that at some point all of our lives would be monitored through technology. Even during the time period of the founding fathers there was science fiction. In fact, some history professors consider the Declaration of Independence to be the original work of science fiction. This information supports my contention that science fiction is a vital part of our history. Not only because it provides us with a source of entertainment, it helps us create accurate predictions of what the future may look like, whether that be in media, technology, or even public equality.

In summation, these two stories both accomplish their goal of addressing current controversial topics as well as predicting and influencing the future. While not all science fiction is designed this way, these stories were able to be highly successful in engulfing the reader in the fictional story, as well as creating a theme that transcends literature and real-life in order to create both a warning and a future outlook for the public during their respective time periods. Both Miller and Wells succeed in this by creating and delivering a positive message as well as a warning to us all, that if we do not change our actions, we know what the future will look like.

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