

## Notes on the Future:

Envisionment of Future Dilemmas within Society as Recorded in Edward Bellamy's Stories and Personal Notebooks

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When Arthur E. Morgan (1878-1975), noted biographer of Edward Bellamy, the famous author of *Equality* (1897), the sequel of *Looking Backward* (1888), was twenty years old, he personally questioned Bellamy to learn if he "consider[ed] the social state pictured in *Equality* the end of human progress" (Morgan 1944: 420). Bellamy's quick, and somewhat "impatient" response was "it is only the beginning. When we get there we shall find a whole infinity beyond" (Morgan 1944: 420).<sup>1</sup> It is this concept of a "whole infinity beyond" that kept Bellamy's stories and notebooks threaded with thoughts of possibilities for the future.

The focus of my paper is based on the conjectures offered by Bellamy in his short stories and unpublished notebooks, especially his "Plot Notebooks", regarding the connectivity between mankind and earth which encompassed Bellamy's notion of a "whole infinity beyond". Since Bellamy was a sickly individual, he spent time convalescing, often in a state of depression (Morgan 1944: 41). He recorded his thoughts regarding man's place in the cosmos as well as the effect of cataclysmic events related to mankind. His speculations are impressively accurate.

From 1875 to 1889, Bellamy published twenty-three known short stories in some of the best magazines of his day, including *Scribner's*, *Atlantic Monthly*, and *Harper's Monthly*. Although his name is associated today with the internationally famous Utopian novel *Looking Backward* and with its successful sequel *Equality*, “Bellamy was recognized by the readers and by the editors of his own epoch as the writer of highly imaginative, psychological, and speculative short stories and novels” (Bowman 1958: 43).<sup>2</sup> I find it interesting that even though Bellamy had a promising future in short story writing, he stopped doing so because he felt that his calling was to focus on correcting “the evils and faults of our social state” (Bellamy, “Autobiographical Fragment”) and improving society to reach his “clear hope of better things” (Bellamy, “Printed Letters”). It is evident when reading his notebooks that he indeed “had much work laid out” for future stories (Bowman 1958: 44). A letter written to him in 1889 by Sylvester Baxter, the editor of the *Boston Herald* suggests that “those who understand [your stories] will understand you; those who do not will enjoy them as ‘brilliantly imaginative,’ and not be disposed to impeach your common sense”.

Perhaps Bellamy had dual concerns; first, that there were not too many readers of his short stories and other novels who actually understood their relationship to his later Utopian works of *Looking Backward* and *Equality*; second; he was perhaps concerned that his public image as a science fiction writer would sully his goal to be a serious writer of social reform. In his Hawaiian Islands Notebook Bellamy wrote:

Equality is the one thing which God will not have and of which he refused to furnish one single example in the whole realm of nature. No two leaves are alike, etc. Every thing is superior to all others in some thing, inferior in others, equal in none.

(Bellamy, "Unpublished Notebook": 15)

Taking this philosophical premise, Bellamy spun into his work *The Constitution: The New Republic*, the statement that "[n]ature tends to inequality, that after men have been made social equals, nothing but laws will prevent one getting more than another" (Bellamy, "Unpublished Notebook" No. 7: 16-17). In the same pages of this notebook, Bellamy also wrote: "All able-bodied citizens shall be led to a fixed term of industrious service, women as well as men, but the condition of the service being as much lighter for women as may seen justified by their lesser strength" (*ibidem*). The idea of the weaker female does not come into consideration for army enlistment in the United States. Perhaps the weakness witnessed in females during Bellamy's time was more directly related to their constrictive clothing, such as corsets inhibiting proper breathing, rather than women's inherent physical weakness.

It seems that his concept of equality for working women reflects his earlier observation of nature's inequality; however, in a fantasy story idea, Bellamy proposes an attempt to create more equality in couple relationships based on individual temperaments. In this story idea, badges are worn to not only indicate the wearer's own temperament – yellow for "bilious", green for "sanguine and all the melancholic", white for "lymphatic" –, but the other edges of the badge indicate the appropriate "permitted" individuals whose temperaments are approved through community laws. Even though Bellamy viewed this method as a means to provide "entire freedom given as to selection of lovers", the result is still government control

of interpersonal relationships. Such governmental controls might be considered insightful when analyzing arranged marriages and also the imposition placed on women's reproduction in some countries (Bellamy, "Unpublished Plots" #1: 35-36).

Those people who are immersed in their personal selves, existing unconcerned about that which will help them become a viable part of humanity, created a dilemma for Bellamy. He used his early writing as a bridge to enable readers to embrace his philosophy of man's relationship to the universal spirit in nature. His first novel, *Six to One: A Nantucket Idyl*, is based on his voyage to Hawaii in 1877. The characters utilize mystical communion with nature, as embodied in the sea, to reveal his philosophy which develops the self-less man, termed the "impersonal man" by Bellamy (Bellamy, "Unpublished Notebook": 1). The main character, Edgerton, a convalescent newspaper editor, is pursued by six women, identified as "girls" in the novel. Since Bellamy was somewhat infirm, the story is quite reflective of his own life. Also since Bellamy loved the sea, it is logical that he uses the natural force of the sea as a means to explain his theories of "the cultivation of the impersonal side of our natures" where the "apotheosis of humanity" is to be found (Morgan 1944: 34, 46). He parallels the story of females pursuing a male to the "aspiration ever since Adam and Eve ate the apple in the hope of being as gods" (Bellamy 1878: 55).

Even though the theme of the novel is a serious one, Bellamy has Addie, one of the characters, actually relating to the sea as if it had power over her choices. It is this "mystical passion" that enabled Addie to find release from self and personal thoughts. She was elevated out of the personal sphere as was

Edgerton; however, it was this same “mystical passion” that worried Bellamy that his philosophy of impersonalization would not be taken seriously because his story dealt with individuals communing with the sea as if it were animate. Ironically, the notion of suppressing personal desires reflects something akin to Buddhism even though Bellamy tried to approach his theories by excluding the religion with which he grew up.<sup>3</sup> Being raised in the religious home of a Baptist minister, with his mother espousing a different religion of a Calvinist, Bellamy saw the “impossibility of harmonious conclusions” in religion (Bellamy, “Unpublished Plots #1”; Morgan 1944: 67). His later “Eliot Carson” notebook referenced a “deliverance for a serf of civilization through equality” that might have been a forethought of the United Nations, created to serve as a melting pot of ideologies-

In another fiction piece, this one a short story “To Whom This May Come”,<sup>4</sup> Bellamy again embraces the sea as a medium of epiphany. The narrator of the story is shipwrecked, and washed by the sea to an island in the Pacific inhabited by the mind-Readers – people who no longer rely upon oral communication of their ideas. Mind-reading affords the inhabitants many qualities that Bellamy deemed important, such as complete justice, for everything can be seen against its background, thus avoiding misjudgements of characters and incidents. Satisfying friendships were achieved through complete understanding and sympathy. Satisfactory communication of ideas abounded since thoughts are totally disclosed as they cannot be in oral communication. “Rapturous love” can be achieved since it includes mental sympathy and understanding added to physical passion (Bellamy 1990: 45).

Another aspect of Bellamy's well-conceived mind-reading islanders is what he terms "generosity of judgment", which allows for all to recognize their own and others' frailties (*idem*, 47). He also connected the concept of generosity of judgment with "complete self- knowledge" for each sees himself as others see him. The mind-reading island people have no hatred, envy or uncharitableness. Bellamy viewed the attributes of the mind-readers as positive qualities to be sought by humankind (Bellamy, "Autobiographical Fragment"). In modern times clairvoyants are used in some United States' police precincts to locate lost individuals or at times bodies buried and abandoned by criminals.

While mind-readers presented positive possibilities, memory was viewed as a danger since memory evoked the past and the guilt associated with it. Bellamy used his novel, *Dr. Heidenhoff's Process*, to illustrate the "tender conscience" of the characters Henry Bayley and Madeline Brand who live unhappy lives. Since they can find no comfort in religion, they attempt to discover a method which will salvage doomed souls such as theirs. Dr. Heidenhoff finds a lobotomy-like operation or a shock treatment which blacks out the memories of such people and permits them to face life, devoid of memories so that they can continue to grow and expand. Even though this may sound like a bazaar idea, medical doctors use electro-shock treatments to help some individuals suffering from acute depression, to in effect erase the bad memories that led to their condition. Bellamy's theory is that people would not obliterate their tendencies to be bad, but they would remain at a constant level rather than going "from bad to worse" (Bellamy 1969: 68). Bellamy viewed memory as the principle of moral degeneracy and thought that

remembered sin is the most utterly diabolical influence in the universe (Bowman 1958: 56). The cliché that “History repeats itself” would be obliterated if Bellamy’s proposal to abandon memory would be employed. If one cannot remember history, no one would be aware of the repetitiveness of behaviour.

Bellamy also predicted interaction with the planet Mars. For Bellamy, the Martians are known through a clairvoyant who “knows of people [on Mars] who have no memory” but have knowledge of their future corresponding to us. In his notebook, Bellamy begins each of his story ideas with various premises. For Dr. Heidenhoff, Bellamy began “Let the hero be a man from planet Mars materialized at a séance with his knowledge of the future” (Bellamy, “Unpublished Plots #1”: 120). Bellamy also included notes regarding the idea that the future “can be studied” and use “of horoscopes detected” as means of knowing the future if Martian “teaches” its real purpose (*idem*, 122). Another important premise is that the “future is mentioned becoming the front and center” can help avoid “too much interest in the past” (*idem*, 123). Present-day scientists dedicate their lives to seeking evidence of life on other planets. The struggle to prove that we are not alone was evident in Bellamy’s conjectures as well.

Bellamy’s theories seem to perceive the concept of theoretical modelling which uses future predictions to impact present choices. In an oblique approach to the concept of “history repeating itself”, Bellamy wrote in one premise that “the past is not hidden from the Martian, but owing to the fact that he has foreseen the future and lived in it before and while it is the present” (*idem*, 124). If we are destined to continue to repeat our human errors, by Bellamy suggesting a Martian who does

not live in the past, this is a theory to enable mankind to make forward progress without the onus of behavioural regression such as wars, poverty, and selfishness.

In his second Plot notebook, Bellamy spoke of Martians communicating through a “teleops” which enables Martians to see us (Bellamy, “Unpublished Plots #2”: 142). He definitely had the right idea, but his speculation on an appropriate name was not quite accurate. He did speak of a telephone which had been invented in 1876, with the patent filed in the United States by Edinburgh, Scotland born, Alexander Graham Bell. Bellamy’s envisionment of the future was amazingly accurate. Today, a cell phone has exactly the satellite capabilities he postulated as well as the ability to see the party to whom one is speaking; however, we have yet to reach a communication level with possible extra terrestrials. Perhaps if Apple Computer geniuses continue to develop sophisticated products such as the i-phone, introduced on June 29, 2007, we may indeed be able to communicate with whatever extra planetary species may exist in the universe.

Bellamy mused on “communication in other worlds” other than “physical resemblance to ours” with a way of “stellar and electrical” “card-bar” used to “talk” in a “place” to “call for reactions” (Bellamy, “Unpublished Plots #1”: 136, 126). From this idea he moves to a setting “on [the] deck of a yacht bound for Vineyard Sound” so that the occupants of the yacht are able to communicate with ‘possibly’ man from Mars” using water as a medium (*idem*, 126). It is interesting that many of the actual early space launches in Russia and the USA involved oceans for retrieval. Also Bellamy’s concept of “stellar and electrical” is not a far step away from the



idea of space satellites used to enable communication with astronauts in outer space.

In another scientifically oriented story, Bellamy mused further on “communication in other worlds” with individuals other than those with a “physical resemblance to ours” (*idem*, 136). Certainly Hollywood film producers in the USA as well as those film producers in Japan have cashed in on this conjecture. The interesting feature of Bellamy’s musings led him to the idea that the means of communication would be “stellar and electrical” using a “card-bar” to “talk” in a special place (*ibidem*). All of this sounds remarkably like he was foreseeing the concept of satellite phones and Internet cafés.

In his notes for a story idea entitled “At Pinney’s Ranch”, Bellamy conceived of the idea of a “friend in San Francisco [who would] be able to communicate with friend in New York. Each has a little electric tablet with a signal, which gives alarm when the friend is thinking of him and take down message automatically if friend is asleep” (Bellamy, “Unpublished Notebook”). This amazingly foresees the pager as well as the answering machine. In addition to the notion of these two electronic gadgets, it also implies the use of wireless communication which was successfully tested ship to shore in 1898, the year Bellamy died.

Even though many of Bellamy’s ideas envisioned electronic devices and technology, the use of natural resources did not escape him. He had a story idea in which cavemen “stored heat of dead summer” so that the heat could be used by nineteenth-century man. This seems directly related to fossil fuels upon which societies are still dependent. He also suggested using hurricane power which he

foresaw being used “in ten years” (Bellamy, “Unpublished Plots #2”: 1, 5-6). While wind power has been used in Europe for hundreds of years, and more recently in the United States, being able to harness the power of a hurricane would indeed be a scientific breakthrough.

When Bellamy was eighteen years old and travelling with his aunt and uncle Packer, he wrote that “discussion during the evening focused on finding a remedy for poverty which led to a further discuss about poor health” (Bellamy, “Unpublished Notebook”: 81). He thought of various “plants or animals which may have mysterious remedies” but “through ignorance are plowed under” (*ibidem*). An article in a 1992 *Science Magazine*, “Chemical Prospecting: Hope for Vanishing Ecosystems?”, discusses exactly what Bellamy foresaw. The scientific research was done under the auspices of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, an agency not unlike that which Bellamy also pondered. The goal of the research of the scientific team was to seek cures from diverse tropical forests in Costa Rica for AIDS, Alzheimer’s disease, or high blood pressure (Ray 1992: 1142-1143).<sup>5</sup>

Bellamy speculated about animal potentiality as well. For example, he had notes in “Notebook C”, rather than his Plot notebooks, regarding “talking to a horse that was at first considered defective, and later in the story, taught as a college course” (Bellamy, “Unpublished Notebook”: 3-4). Today there is an entire profession dedicated to animal psychology replete with college educated individuals whose professional goal is to help animals relieve depression or anxiety

and other human frailties posited upon animals and treated through the same conversational therapies utilized with depressed or anxious humans.

In one of Bellamy's handwritten Plot notebooks, he created a community set in another world where badges indicate the class of each societal segment: Crielians wear yellow; white is for those who are in the work force as "well-aholics", those workers who feel better working harder (Bellamy, "Unpublished Plots #1": 114). Even though Bellamy's *Looking Backward* suggested shorter work-weeks, this story focuses on longer working hours, similar to the twenty-first century concept of gaining more personal reward for never being away from one's work through the intervention of the Internet and personal computers. It is also interesting that in the second plot notebook, a note was made to include "no holidays in the year 2000" for his utopian novel *Looking Backward* (Bellamy, "Unpublished Plots #2": 36). Perhaps he felt that the Protestant work ethic, in which he was so sternly raised, was already jeopardized with his notion of working less days per week. Also, he missed the jargon used today, a "workaholic",<sup>6</sup> to identify a person who works more hours than is normally identified as an average forty-hour work week, rather than a well-aholic. It is interesting that he chose a form of the word alcohol to indicate an addiction to work, much like an addiction to alcohol. It wasn't until seventy years later that the "workaholic" became part of the modern lexicon.

Following the theme of alcohol consumption, in a story idea titled "Take Off on Prohibition", Bellamy suggested that the community should "distribute coffee and tea cards" so that people will find more interest in drinking these beverages

with “lots of honey” (Bellamy, “Unpublished Plots #1”: 117). This idea sounds like two ideas embraced in the twenty-first century: one, the notion of using credit cards as a means of commerce, and two, the idea of having coffee/tea cards in large franchises such as Starbucks Coffee. The major difference is that in Bellamy’s socialistic society, the coffee/ tea cards were provided by the government, rather than purchased by the individual. Also, since it was suggested that Bellamy liked to drink,<sup>7</sup> perhaps he was seeking a means to break his own addiction and also help others do the same.

Even though his second plot notebook was incomplete, written sporadically with failing handwriting on various pages, some notes reveal his prescience even as his health was failing. For example, he predicted “a time [line?]<sup>8</sup> of electric cars” (Bellamy, “Unpublished Plots #2”: 48). Since many of the notes in the notebooks are not dated, a range of time between 1871 and 1881 is posited to Bellamy’s handwritten notebooks. This places his postulations regarding electric cars in a parallel time frame with Charles Bush from Cleveland, Ohio in the United States, who invented a dynamo and an arc lamp lighting system in 1879 (cf. *Closed Circuit Newsletter* [2007]) and Thomas Alva Edison from New Jersey in the United States who invented the electric light bulb, precursor of today’s modern incandescent bulb. By 1880, electricity was being hailed as a modern marvel that would revolutionize households and industry nationwide. Optimists envisioned increased demand for electricity; however, it was men of vision such as Edward Bellamy who predicted more creative uses. Today, as the world seeks alternative fuels for

transportation vehicles, electric cars may be one of the more efficient systems if smaller storage batteries with larger charge capacities could be developed.

As a man of vision, Edward Bellamy was highly respected and gained world-wide notoriety from his postulations in his novel, *Looking Backward*. Even though his main goal was to enlighten the public to embrace his vision of a more equitable society, his means of reaching that goal was firmly bound with conjectures of immense importance. The preconditions he presented such as “Let the hero be from planet Mars”, enabled him to consider modes of communication, transportation and interaction of which other men had not yet dreamed (Bellamy, “Unpublished Plots #1”: 120). His connectivity between mankind and earth’s place in the universe encompassed Bellamy’s notion of a “whole infinity beyond”. Sadly, like other amazingly talented creative individuals whose lives were foreshortened due to illness, Bellamy did not have enough time to witness some of his insightful ideas come to fruition.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Arthur E. Morgan began writing books after his retirement from the Tennessee Valley Authority in 1940. He kept extensive notebooks when he was a young man, with recorded impressions and direct quotes of his talks with Bellamy.

<sup>2</sup> I examined Edward Bellamy's handwritten notebooks at Houghton Library, Harvard University; however, I have included Sylvia Bowman's citation since she wrote this in her book prior to my viewing Bellamy's notebooks.

<sup>3</sup> Bellamy experienced great turmoil in religious choices since his father was a Baptist minister and his mother was a staunch Calvinist. He worked on formulating his own religion or lack, thereof, and in doing so seemed to gravitate toward the sense of enlightenment seen in Buddhism.

<sup>4</sup> This was one of fourteen stories to appear as part of *The Blindman's World and Other Stories* (1889). It was reprinted in *Apparitions of Things to Come: Bellamy's Tales of Mystery & Imagination* (1990), edited by Franklin Rosemont.

<sup>5</sup> The substance is found in coumarin compounds where calanolides, a novel HIV –inhibitory class of coumarin derivatives from the tropical rainforest tree, *Calophyllum Lanigeum* can be found. The pharmaceutical companies are sponsoring the research (Gustofson 1993: 36).

<sup>6</sup> The term “workaholic” was first coined by W. E. Oates, a pastor, in “On Being a Workaholic” (published in *Pastoral Psychology*, vol. 19, 1968), and refers to a person who neglects his family, withdraws from social life, and loses interest in sex.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Interview with Stephen R. Jendrysik, President of the Edward Bellamy National Homestead, Chicopee, MA. 11 June 2007. Jendrysik had close contact with Marion Bellamy Earnshaw until she died in 1992. It is curious that in an entire chapter dedicated to “The Personality of Edward Bellamy” in Arthur Morgan's biography, Bellamy's proclivity for drinking was not mentioned in any testimonial about him in Morgan's biography (Morgan 1944).

<sup>8</sup> In Widdicombe and Preiser's *Revisiting the Legacy of Edward Bellamy (1850-1998), American Author and Social Reformer: Uncollected and Unpublished Writings Scholarly Perspectives for a New Millennium*, this is identified as “A line of electric cars between this and Adam” in his Plots for Stories #2: 1, 5-6; however, when I viewed his notebooks at Harvard's Houghton Library, it said “time” rather than “line”.

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