

**FINDING VEBLEN'S LEISURE CLASS STUDIES IN SOME NOVELS BY  
H.G. WELLS, FELIX J. PALMA, AND SUZANNE COLLINS**

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**ABSTRACT**

Thorstein Veblen has a mixed presence in modern sociology because many of his findings are still viable, his writing style is a gymnastic exercise in syntax, and his theories of causality are speculative. Rosenberg (1956) says that Veblen had little impact on the sociology of his time, House (1936) wrote that sociologists of the future would be wise to pay attention to Veblen's discourse, and Coser (1971) called Veblen one of the "masters." Veblen is most recognized for his descriptors of the leisure class lifestyle, but his discussions also have currency outside sociology, especially in popular literature. This article, for example, evinces some of the main features of Veblen's studies in H.G. Wells' novels *The Time Machine* and *The War of the Worlds*, in Felix J. Palma's novels *The Map of Time* and *The Map of the Sky*, and in Suzanne Collins' trilogy of novels *The Hunger Games*, *Catching Fire*, and *Mockingjay*. These sets of stories represent a combination of convenience and purposive samples, but they are not used as substitutes for scholarly evidence. They can instead be used by serious and by casual readers of Veblen to better understand the scope of his complexities.

**INTRODUCTION**

Novels are not intended to be evidence of sociological findings, but the stories often contain relatable sociology as novelists formulate their constructed mediated realities for the reader's enjoyment as perceived mediated realities (Whetmore 1991). H.G. Wells' novels *The Time Machine* (1895/1963) and *The War of the Worlds* (1897/1964), Felix J. Palma's novels *The Map of Time* (2012a) and *The Map of the Sky* (2012b), and Suzanne Collins' popular set of novels *The Hunger Games* (2008), *Catching Fire* (2009), and *Mockingjay* (2010) are cases in point. Each contains several of the described lifestyle variables identified in Veblen's *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (1899/1994) as is shown here.

This article, understanding sociology through fiction, has several stages of development. First, dominant elements about Veblen and the highlights of his leisure-class study are offered, with some enhancements. Second, the same process is then followed for Wells, for Palma, and for Collins, and their respective stories. Third, the presence of Veblen's contributions in the selected novels is illustrated, and the completion of this piece

provides ample evidence showing that traditional sociology and elements of popular literature can be welded together, successfully.

This project began while reading Palma's *The Map of Time*, and that was followed by reading Wells' *The Time Machine* because Palma's "time" book is based on Wells' "time" book. Those readings were followed by reading Wells' *The War of the Worlds* because it was the inspiration for Palma's *The Map of the Sky* story, and as these four books were being read, several approaches to this study were explored. It was finally determined that Veblen's presence was appropriate, but vestiges from other considerations remained. It was also concluded that Collins' books, and the movie version of the first, fit the theme of this article so they were included. All was accomplished to stay in concert with the meta-thematic style of O'Sullivan (2002, 2006, 2007, and 2011a) who uses literature to explore sociology's ideas. He believes in the tandem premises that sociology can be found anywhere (Berger 1963) and that sociologists sometimes need to separate themselves from traditional research settings (Ogburn 1931). Normal academic lenses, topics,

research methods, and sources of insight may satisfy the rigors of science, but do little to stimulate a broader curiosity about sociology. This article is offered then as a grounded bridge between expectations.

### **VEBLÉN AND THE THEORY OF THE LEISURE CLASS**

The life and career of Thorstein B. Veblen (b.1857-d.1929) were marked by marginality (Coser; Rosenberg). Coser, for example, described him as being a marginal Norwegian, a marginal student, a marginal academic, a marginal free lance, and a marginal man. Rosenberg calls him eccentric and “a man at once strange, uprooted, complex, and *déclassé*” (8). Regardless of where he was or what he was doing, he did not seem to fit. Though he may have had his share of shortcomings and was academically mobile, his renowned *The Theory of the Leisure Class* should be required reading in classes addressing social theory and social stratification.

The book’s value is that it describes the lifestyle of those whose wealth comes from inheritance, but that gain’s place in universal cultural history is not accepted by all scholars. Nonetheless, Veblen identifies a number of lifestyle variables that are characteristic of “old money” as they are compared to other social classes. Those traits are offered in combined and aggregate forms.

#### **Wealth, Poverty, and Class Structure**

Members of the leisure class, according to Veblen, are rich, but their assets are not dependent on recent earnings and are separated from actual work, wages, and salaries in an industrial economy. He illustrates these ideas in several places. “The upper classes are by custom excluded or exempted from industrial occupations...” (1). Work is divided into exploitation and drudgery (9) where labor is morally impossible for the noble (27). Wealth brings dignity, refinement, and respectability, but absence or loss of wealth brings debasement and disgrace (57) for local and foreign populations alike.

Veblen does not clarify finite lifestyle features of classes below the leisure class except to say that their consumption habits are often downwardly imitative. Veblen does, however, spend some time describing the opposing poverty class in the same ways that Lewis (1968/1969) discusses the culture of poverty and that Gans (1971) addresses the functions of poverty. The jobs of the poor are to stoically serve the needs and the wishes of those above them, toward whom they hold quiescent disregard. They are street savvy and they protect their own. Unpleasant jobs are often comparable to those of India’s *untouchables* sub-caste (Nanda 1980:190). Decisions are often spontaneous, impulsive, lack deferred gratification or forethought, yet satisfy immediate needs.

#### **Conspicuous Consumption and Conspicuous Leisure**

These are Veblen’s hallmark characteristics and habits of the leisure class. The basic necessities of life (food, clothing and shelter) are required by members of all social classes, but members of the leisure class can afford the creature comforts. It is not sufficient, however, to consume secretly, so conspicuous displays of economic privilege and excessive consumption go hand-in-hand. By so doing, prestige and esteem are accorded to the consumer-displayer and to those who engage in overt leisure time activities.

#### **Leisure Time**

Such time does not merely refer to time-not-spent-working because that could also refer to imposed unemployment. Veblen discusses leisure for the privileged class as the ability to be free from the need to work because personal wealth derived from investments, inheritance, and absentee ownership provides insulation from active management and the demands of labor forces. Veblen’s thoughts are later supplemented by Dumazedier (1968), who concludes that leisure has no utilitarian purpose other than pleasure-seeking and recuperation. Viewed this way, leisure activities are selfish pursuits.

The economically privileged in the leisure class are then free to pursue such peer-acceptable habits as indulgence in aesthetic pursuits at private schools, while leaving public schools for practical arts, and they spend their vacation time at upscale resorts. They often attend “high brow” operatic or orchestral events and participate in gentlemanly sports. They practice refined etiquette and attend private displays of material acquisitions. They are the caretakers of antiquity and sponsors of the performing arts. Polite conversation is rehearsed, punctuality is prescribed, ceremony is paramount, and fashionable disregard for the poor is practiced. Decisions are based on calculated returns, and they are often perceived as being haughty by outsiders. The leisure class is essentially comprised of elitists toward whom Veblen may have felt much animosity (Rosenberg 20, 22), an assessment that begs the question “Was Veblen describing the leisure class or indicting it?”

### **The Role of Women**

Married leisure class women, according to Veblen, have several duties: Providing heirs for their husbands, becoming familiar with the arts, and being silent on political or economic matters. They are to be good hostesses, agree with their husbands, and if they are young and pretty, they are displayed as trophies as evidence of their husbands’ ancient predatory skills. Women of lesser financial means are relegated to other status-role sets, but regardless of class membership women are chattel (Veblen 15). Novelist Bram Stoker voiced a similar opinion in *Dracula* (1897/1988: 57) during a conversation between two women when one asks the other “...why are men so noble when we women are so little worthy of them?”

### **Luck and Phenomenology**

Veblen discusses ascension into societies’ privileged classes through a combination of cultural and Darwinian traits. Industrial growth, he argues, is based on “a process of quantitative causation” (173) or rationality

over invisible causality. Executive privilege in such a system is based on inherited cultural and genetic codes, whereas similar but reversed templates are the fate of the poor.

Luck, as “propensity to eventuate in a given end” (Veblen 171), is something over which a person or a social class has no control, but it can be given a helping hand. The sporting man who feels an incomplete sense of outcome may be drawn to “wearing charms or talismans to which more or less of efficacy is felt to belong” (Veblen 171), meaning that good luck charms and rituals are used to direct desired outcomes.

Just as the future cannot be specifically predicted or explained, nor can all beliefs be verified or debunked via scientific revelation. Social superstitions, lucky charms, phenomenology, and romanticized folk lore offer meaning, hope, and explanation beyond physical evidence or theological traditions.

### **Wealth, Poverty, and Sports Entertainment**

Male members of the leisure class are free to engage in sporting events of their choosing, but not in public venues and not in those sports that are considered as being “common.” The elite go to private clubs for their recreation and engage in expensive sports that are beyond the financial ability of the less privileged. When members of the leisure class attend the performing arts, the performers and their directors are not peers, but only entertainers. That same relationship is known about professional golfers who were disallowed from mixing with country club members, being relegated to locker room facilities.

Ancient gladiators, in similar fashion, were owned, fought to the death, and those whom they entertained wagered on the contestants and preferential outcomes. The combatants were from underclasses, often slaves, had no rights, and were forced into arenas for the prurient pleasure of others. Survivors may have been made freedmen, trainers, or owners, ever functional for the leisure class and never allowed into it. Finally, when leisure class men engaged in business, in politics, in debates, and in sports, one ethic

runs through all: Losing is never an acceptable outcome.

### **Techgnosticism**

This is O'Sullivan's 2011b expression, but Veblen's work is apropos to it. Both writers discuss a reverential and quasi-religious, almost spiritual, awe directed toward material creations that have political, economic, and social implications. Similar deference is directed toward their entrepreneurs, but without religions' ritualistic and symbolic trappings. Such people as Leland Stanford, John D. Rockefeller, Andrew Carnegie, Cornelius Vanderbilt, and J.P. Morgan were successful risk takers, power brokers, and economic expansionists whose industrial and financial legacies are virtually synonymous with the nation's "Gilded Age" of development.

Veblen was born toward the end of the acknowledged Industrial Revolution so he would have witnessed many of the technological advances at the turn of the century. Those changes helped create industrial capitalism as Veblen understood it, as well as its rational principles of organization and the well-defined social class system and lifestyles derived from it. He was trained in economics and is recognized as a sociologist. His thoughts may not have been specifically borrowed by Wells, by Palma, or by Collins, but Veblen is present in their stories, so it is now time to look at them.

### **THE NOVELISTS AND THEIR BOOKS**

Sociologists, like novelists, have stories to tell, but their tales may vary. Sometimes sociologists and other social scientists use their methods and venues to promote certain paradigms or needs for social reform, as some novelists do. Borrowing from Steward's cultural ecology theory (1979), O'Sullivan (2007) called such writers *peripheral activists*, much like *guerilla minstrels* (Hampton 1986) whose music exists at the peripheries of core social institutions, commenting about them, and bringing to the forefront moral imperatives for social change

or responsibility. Many of James A. Michener's famous novels, for example, call for ecological stewardship rather than raw exploitation of natural resources, but not all novels are so constructed.

Others are written purely for entertainment with the use of active imaginations to create vivid images, capturing the attention of readers—the intersections between constructed mediated realities and perceived mediated realities. Writers of such stories can simply be called *peripheral artists* whose works use the core social institutions, or an unvisited timeframe, as backdrops without impugning them.

The novelists chosen for this study represent both types. Some of their books have overt entertainment value, yet others have the combined purposes of entertainment and enlightenment. All of them, however, capture Veblen's analyses to varying degrees of precision and inclusion as Wells and his books are discussed first.

### **H.G. WELLS' THE TIME MACHINE AND THE WAR OF THE WORLDS**

Many of the books written by Herbert George (H.G.) Wells (b.1866-d.1946) are now classified as science fiction, but that assignment is a retroactive one. Wells' *The Time Machine*, *The War of the Worlds*, and other tales of speculative imagination by him and by Jules Verne, were then identified as *scientific romance*. The expression "science fiction" waited until 1926 for its origination by Hugo Gernsback in his *Amazing Stories* magazine (Roberts 2000). The genre has been called a "literature of ideas" (Gilks, Fleming, and Allen 2003) as various elements speculate on lifestyles, settings, time-space travel, technologies, parallel/alternative universes, and so on, trying to describe some thing or some time that has not yet arrived. As such, it *loosely* reflects the expression "the doctrine of maybe" from Jainism's *syadvada* (Parrinder 1971:244) that can be rephrased as "What if...?" or "Why didn't ...?"

The life and career of "Bertie" Wells were identified by a wide range of labels including

father, husband, womanizer, draper, chemist/pharmacy assistant, teacher, artist, socialist, social activist, Fabian, journalist, social critic, writer, and novelist. His publications cover a wide range of topics in fiction and in non-fiction. He is likely best known for his contributions to science fiction, and within those works perhaps his most popular books are *The Time Machine* and *The War of the Worlds*. Such renown may be due to the two-tiered stories that each contains, but it may also be due to presentations in other media. Both books have been made into several movies wherein liberties were taken with the plots, locales, and special visual effects. Orson Welles' 1939 radio broadcast version of *The War of the Worlds* remains a masterpiece of adaptation.

### ***The Time Machine***

A narrator tells the story of an unidentified scientist named the Time Traveler who invented a machine that allowed him to travel in time. He first advanced 800,000 years, then about 30,000,000 more from his cottage home in late 19<sup>th</sup> Century London, returning to it, and probably traveling back to the future. Such scientists as Albert Einstein (1920), Stephen Hawking (1988), and Carl Sagan (1980), even novelist Michener (1982:612) applaud the hypothetical value of such ability, but all would agree that it has more attraction for the imagination than scientific probability.

The Time Traveler introduces a miniature version of his device to several of his friends. They are educated/rational men— a professor, a mayor, a physician, a psychologist, a historian, an editor, a journalist, the unidentified narrator who has seventeen publications on his C.V., and friend Filby. All understand the theory of time-space travel but have difficulty accepting its actuality. The Time Traveler demonstrates the capability of the model as it vanishes apparently into another dimension whereupon the guests voice their incredulity, bid their host a good night, and leave. The Time Traveler decides to give his full-sized prototype a “test drive” into time travel, but it

is not space travel because he remains stationary. He witnessed accelerated changes around him, was not part of them, and he remained in one place.

He enters the future in a pristine environment where he meets the Eloi who are a care-less people who seem to have no vested interests in anything except relaxed leisure. Even when one of their own people is in peril, the Time Traveler is the only person who saves the drowning girl. As the story unfolds, he learns that the Eloi do not work because it is not required, having evolved into a listless race: The Morlocks, hideous and nocturnal subterranean dwellers, provide for the Eloi while raising them as their livestock.

The Morlocks find and confiscate the Time Machine so the Time Traveler ventures into their underground lair where unsuspected truths about human evolution are revealed. He eventually battles the Morlocks with fire and recovers his device. Distraught with his experiences and conclusions, he reactivates the Time Machine, leaves the remains of humankind to its fate, travels forward millions of years, and eventually returns to his home in London where the story begins.

The guests are so dismayed by his mien and tale that they consider it a hoax. One guest remains after the others leave and has a short chat with the host, who then excuses himself for a few moments. After a while the guest/narrator follows the Time Traveler to another room where he sees...

“a ghostly, indistinct figure sitting in a whirling mass of glass and black for a moment— a figure so transparent that the bench behind with its sheets of drawings was absolutely distinct; but this phantasm vanished as I rubbed my eyes. The Time Machine had gone.” (Wells 1895/1963:138-139)

Wells was no fan of elitism, but through the Time Traveler he showed that the Morlocks had no propensity for guardianship or leadership. They laid antiquity to waste and the Eloi were totally helpless. It is easy to conclude, then, that the Time Traveler had returned to the future to reshape it.

### ***The War of the Worlds***

Mars is the fourth planet from the Sun, approximately 144 million miles from it and approximately 49 million miles from Earth. Space probes now emit data showing that it is an inhospitable and uninhabitable place, but such findings have never deterred poets, novelists, screenwriters, musicians, theologians, philosophers, and astrologers from romanticizing it or discussing its superstitious portent, as Wells did.

Britain is no stranger to military-imperialist invasions, but this time *it* is invaded by foreign forces— the Martians and their well-armed spaceships. After waxing philosophic, the story's narrator tells how he and other scientists noticed an unusual sight that resembled an explosion on the planet Mars, and others soon followed. Ten days later, Woking, a small village outside London, becomes the "Plymouth Rock" for the extraterrestrials who landed at other places across the country.

Curious on-lookers, local politicians, scientists, and police/military personnel arrive at the scene to make sense of it. The Martians, and their weapons, emerge making their presence known with the obvious military purpose of killing people and destroying things. The much-hailed and confident British military is called to destroy the invaders. Its weaponry is powerless against heat rays, deadly gases, Black Smoke, and Red Weed— an invasive plant like a fast-growing kudzu that sucks the energy and oxygen from all living things near it. The future of the world is at risk, modern weapons are useless against the invaders, and humankind is harvested by the aliens.

Apparently the planet Mars had lost its capability to sustain life, so its residents decided that Earth would be a substitute home. Perceiving that the atmospheres of Mars and of Earth are different, Wells used this difference to his advantage. The Martians were from a different ecosystem, lacking the natural immunities that humans develop through evolution and adaptations to different environments. The Martians died not from the technologies of modern weapons

but from microscopic life forms against which they had no natural defenses.

Wells was a peripheral activist and a peripheral artist since both books had tandem purposes. Each contains an outward and obvious story of adventure while containing not-so-subtle social commentaries about differential distributions of power, prestige, and privilege that were based on Wells' socialist ideas about political economics. Since Wells and his books provided inspiration for Palma and his books, it is now time to look at them.

### **PALMA'S *THE MAP OF TIME AND THE MAP OF THE SKY***

Felix J. Palma (b.1968) is a young Spanish author and is previously known for short stories. His "map" books are early ventures into full-length novels and are strongly influenced by Wells and other writers of the era, especially Garrett P. Serviss. His novel, *Edison's Conquest of Mars* (1898/2010), is an unofficial sequel to *The War of the Worlds* that was viewed unkindly by Wells in real life and in Palma's book.

Dust jacket comments for the "sky" book identify his works as being in the genre of meta-fictional time. Its features can include an author's self-reflection in the tale, reference notes or asides added to the story, authors speaking about their stories as they progress, flexible timeframes, and presenting biographies of imaginary writers (Hutcheon 1984, 1987; Levinson 2007; Waugh 1984). Palma takes this last feature and modifies it considerably by taking authors' known biographies and creating alternative or fictional ones, working them into broader plots.

Palma's books are also clear-cut science fiction as they represent the intersection between classic themes: Space-time travel, alternative or parallel universes, alternative history, time warps, and the moral dilemma that time travelers would face. Should the events of one timeframe be modified to affect desirable outcomes in another? Palma's approaches to these topics provide plausible answers to "What if...?" questions, as long as

readers suspend their disbeliefs as the books are read.

The “map” books are fairly long and layered, each containing three integrated stories. As such, only brief sketches and lacings can be offered.

### ***The Map of Time***

The first story in the book tells of a footloose young man, the son of a wealthy businessman in 1890s London, who becomes infatuated with a portrait in his father’s house. The subject is a beautiful young woman who was painted by Walter Sickert, who, incidentally, is identified as being Jack the Ripper in Patricia Cornwell’s 2002 non-fiction forensic investigation of London’s infamous killer. The young man learns her name and that she is a White Chapel prostitute. He finds her, secures her services, falls in love with her, and she is disemboweled and dismembered by Jack the Ripper as Palma seems to have modeled her after an actual victim of the serial killer. Still in love with her eight years later, and distraught that his father disowned him for such contemptuous behavior, the young man decides to commit suicide in her apartment.

He is stopped by his likewise freewheeling cousin who has heard that H.G. Wells has a Time Machine. They convince the author to use the device to go back to the night of the murder and prevent it from happening. Wells agrees to this noble enterprise, the man is transported, the murderer is thwarted, and the woman continues to live in an alternative/parallel universe. The cousins eventually marry twins and are incorporated into the business run by their fathers, but both are allowed to continue their randy ways.

The second story in the book is also about Wells and his disagreements with an aspiring novelist of Wells’ style. Wells rejects both him and his efforts. The jilted writer proceeds to prove his merit by creating his own Time Machine with the aid of hired actors and an elaborate sound set. His Time Machine “takes” wealthy riders to the year 2000 so they can witness the earth-saving battle between Captain Derek Shackleton and

Solomon, the wicked automaton. One passenger, a rich London socialite, spies Shackleton after the battle and falls in love with him. Shackleton is actually an itinerant worker and in real life meets the young patron who believes he was transshipped back in time to save the future. Wells agrees to another worthy plan, helping Shackleton and his relationship with the passenger into the future, but the actor’s employer is threatened by this affair because he has a lucrative charade. He employs his other actors to kill Shackleton, but they create their own staged production, saving Shackleton from drowning, thus allowing him to return to his true love living as a man from the future in then-1890s England.

The third story is centered on some perplexing murders where one victim’s torso is burned, almost as if he was shot with ray gun similar to that used by the Martians in Wells’ tale. As the story unfolds, Wells receives a mysterious letter from a not-yet-born descendant who warns him of a plot by a *Homo temporis* or Time Traveler (Palma 2012a:596) to steal his unpublished manuscripts, as well ones by Stoker and by William James. All will then be issued under a pseudonym, but the exchange is interrupted by Shackleton who is indebted to Wells. Shackleton is killed with a heat ray. The books are saved. The Time Traveler vanishes, and the reader is left to wonder “What if...?”

### ***The Map of the Sky***

Like its predecessor, there are three entwined stories, and the first begins in London when Wells is visited by Serviss. He takes Wells to a secret storage area in a natural history museum that holds a preserved Martian. Wells is skeptical and unaware that a recent cut deposits some blood on the inert form that absorbs his DNA and clones Wells.

The Martian was discovered by an expedition to the Antarctic that was searching for the legendary “hole in the earth” that led to a subterranean world. The expedition got caught in the ice when a strange vehicle fell from the sky and crash landed. The

spaceship was impervious to the sailors' weapons. A recovered body was taken back to the ship where mysterious events began to occur. Eventually the ship and the creature are blown apart in an explosion that leaves only two human survivors, and one of them is later revealed as being Edgar Allen Poe.

The second story begins in New York City where a wealthy immigrant from London and patron of the arts meets and falls in love with an "old rich" socialite. She wants nothing of the newcomer unless he can re-create a Martian invasion that adequately reflects Wells' tale, thereby enhancing her social status by lending credibility to an important heirloom of hers. That inheritance was an ornate Map of the Sky created by her ancestor Richard Adam Locke, perpetrator of the Great Moon Hoax of 1835, which appeared as a series of newspaper articles in the *New York Sun*— a tabloid in its day.

The suitor accepts the challenge, returns to England, sets a date and a place for the exhibition, and seeks the aid of Wells because they had already met— he was the writer whom Wells had dismissed. Wells again denies a request for help, but on the day of reckoning, a Martian spaceship was in the commons at Woking, a crowd was gathered, and Martians emerged. They were not, however, actors with toy weapons. To paraphrase Palma, the impossible had happened.

The Martian was not killed in Antarctica, but rather had slid under the ice and became cryonic. Later found by another expedition, it was transported to London and was copied from Wells' genetic codes. The now-cloned alien was the Envoy of the invasion force that had already arrived as fifth columns, silently waiting as humans for his calling. The invasion took place just as Wells described it— heat/ray guns, Black Smoke, the Red Reed, and the reaping of humans.

Wells, the socialite, the con artist, and others are caught in the maelstrom, simultaneously trying to escape it and stop it when Wells discovers that he too is a Time Traveler. Palma modifies Wells' time travel to time *and* space travel by having Wells zip back to Antarctica where he kills the Martian

and returns to London before he is born. Wells then gets to witness his own childhood and adult years, and watches the staged invasion from the fringes of the audience where he sees himself in the crowd.

The books by Wells that are used here are stand-alone ones, but the two by Palma should be read in succession because elements from the first are in the second. Using the criteria offered here, Palma is a peripheral artist, and if his intentions are to be a peripheral activist they are deeply hidden. Suzanne Collins' intentions are different from Palma's, deeply rooted like Wells' as criticisms of abusive social power.

### **SUZANNE COLLINS' *HUNGER GAMES*, *CATCHING FIRE*, AND *MOCKINGJAY***

Suzanne Collins (b.1962), the author of the Hunger Games trilogy and another series of fantasy fiction books, is the daughter of a U.S. Air Force officer whose deployments took his family far and wide. Those travels were one source of inspiration for her popular trilogy because she was able to directly observe the widespread presence and effects of poverty, hunger, deprivation, powerlessness, and war on children. Other sources of inspiration were ancient gladiator fights, televised wars, and "reality television's" contrived contests, settings, plots, outcomes, and rewards structures. An even greater influence was the Greek myth about Theseus and the Minotaur that has several variations (Kerenyi 1978; Walker 1995) as are offered in a consolidated and abbreviated form.

After a war between Greece and Crete, King Minos ordered seven unarmed boys and seven unarmed girls sent from Greece to Crete to feed the man-bull Minotaur as a reminder that Greece was vanquished. The frequency of these harvestings varied by source, but one year Theseus, son of Aërtha, sired by gods Aegeus and Poseidon on the same night, volunteered, substituting himself for the selected boy. Theseus hid a sword in his tunic and killed the monster. As often happened in Greek lore, Theseus was accorded divine traits with his humanity,



became the embodiment of democratic potential, mayor/founder of Athens, and unified Greece.

Collins' books offer a duplex tale of two classes. The overt one tells of children from the under classes who are forced into gladiatorial survival. The back story is about the differential distributions of power and privilege, and this polarity is a popular theme in novels as O'Sullivan's 2002 literature review for a case study in labor economics shows. Collins' books can easily be added to his examples.

### ***The Hunger Games***

Panem is the country that was formally called The United States of America; the city called the Capitol sits deep in the Rockies and replaces Washington, D.C. as the capitol; and twelve Districts now replace the states. A boy and a girl are selected randomly every year from each District to engage in deadly and televised combat against each other to re-celebrate the victory of Capitol forces over the Districts' armies in a failed revolt from seventy-three years earlier. The boys and girls, all teenagers, are called "Tributes" in the contests that are fatal versions of "King on the Mountain" because they are fought until there is a single living survivor. That person, boy or girl, uses a combination of skills, including brute strength, deadliness, or cunning (Collins 2008:282), elusion, or other abilities, in the hope of staying alive and bringing honor to the home District.

Panem's economic cartography directly reflects its social class structure. There is the Capitol where its leaders and leisure class live, and then there are the twelve surrounding Districts that provide the Capitol and the other Districts with material goods, food, and utilities. Throughout the whole land is the presence of the Peacekeepers— a national police force.

District 1 provides luxury items for the Capitol, and District 2 furnishes masonry products. District 3 produces electronic goods, and District 4 houses fisheries. District 5 generates electrical power, and District 6 contributes national transportation.

District 7 procures lumber, and District 8 creates textiles. District 9 harvests grains, and District 10 maintains livestock. District 11 provides other agricultural products and District 12, the "Seam," produces coal. District 13 generated nuclear power before it was eliminated in the revolt that led to the Hunger Games.

At the annual "Reaping," the day children are chosen as Tributes, Primrose Everdeen is selected as the girl from District 12, but her older sister, Katniss, volunteers as her replacement. Subsequently, Katniss Everdeen and Peeta Mellark, the boy, are sent as Tributes from their District to the 74<sup>th</sup> Annual Hunger Games, where the catchphrase "may the odds be ever in your favor" is repeated often.

Twenty-four Tributes battle each other in the controlled environment, with the games telecast to audiences with different effects. Residents of the Capitol are entertained, whereas residents of the twelve Districts watch in anguish. The Tributes are always at a disadvantage because Gamemakers manipulate the obstacles and rules of play, meaning there are no rules of play. One by one the children die. Some are killed by Katniss. Ultimately, she and Peeta survive an attack from wolves that are not ordinary beasts. They are called "muttations" and they were genetic anomalies created with the hair, the eyes, and the voices of fallen Tributes— a variation of Theseus' Minotaur. Katniss is defiant, convincing Peeta to eat poison berries with her, thus denying the Capitol and its leaders the joy of victory over the historic rebels. The rules are changed again. Katniss and Peeta are declared co-victors, but Panem's President Snow is not amused, concerned that the seeds for another uprising had been planted...

### ***Catching Fire***

and they were, with Katniss as a catalyst. The dresses she wore for galas at her first Hunger Games were partially comprised of artificial fire, from which she was dubbed "the girl on fire." That handle, combined with her spirit of defiance, solidifies President Snow's

perception that she was a threat. A year later he decrees...

“On the seventy-fifth anniversary, as a reminder to the rebels that even the strongest among them cannot overcome the power of the Capitol, the male and female tributes will be reaped from the existing pool of victors.” (Collins 2009:172)

The rules had been changed again, sending Katniss, Peeta, and surviving Tributes from other Districts back into a new arena.

Katniss and Peeta follow the same drills as before –presentation to the people of the Capitol and training sessions– but now with older Tributes and their abilities. The arena is changed, destroyed, and there are survivors. When Katniss recovers from the shock of the explosion that destroys the set, she is in the rebel stronghold of District 13. There she is told that her District, her hometown, her friends, and her family were all erased by Peacekeepers, who were quelling a new revolt and its insurgents.

### **Mockingjay**

Tributes were informally allowed to take one item that was symbolic of their districts, or one good luck charm, as long as it was non-lethal. The book version of *The Hunger Games* has the mayor’s daughter giving Katniss a golden brooch designed as a Mockingjay bird, and that design eventually becomes the emblem for all rebels, especially those in District 13. The area and its populations had not been destroyed as previously believed, but had gone underground. Katniss begrudgingly becomes the persona of the bird and the movement for social reform. Theseus has been reincarnated.

Physical battles are described as are Katniss’ emotional ones. Bad things happen to memorable characters. The final confrontations between Katniss and President Snow and the national forces against the rebels take place in the Capitol. Katniss commits a murder, is arrested, and is released. Physical, social, and emotional

healing occurs as strife, oppression, deprivation, and war end. The Hunger Games are over, and Katniss reflects upon the past and wonders about the future.

### **VEBLEN AND THE NOVELISTS**

There are several ways that this section could have been organized and presented. It was finally decided that salient illustrations by authors rather than by individual books was the best approach.

#### **Finding Veblen in Wells**

Palma says something to the effect that science fiction is the domain of such writers as Wells or Verne whereas social commentary is left to such other novelists as Charles Dickens. *The Time Machine*, for example, was a bitter declaration against Britain’s dual-class social system that is manifest in Parliament’s House of Lords and House of Commons. The empire’s privileged royalty has been, and still is, viewed as a political and financial liability for the commoners. That dichotomy is evident as the Eloi toil at nothing while the Morlocks do nothing but toil.

*The War of the Worlds* has a similar thoughtful presence. Wells’ story is a partial retelling of Sir George Chesney’s *The Battle of Dorking* (1871/2008) wherein England is invaded by Germany, but Wells shifts the story a little. Wells would likely have read history lessons about British military victories and ignominy at such faraway places as Gawilghur and Khartoum; he would have read in the news about Isandlwana, Rorke’s Drift, and Ulundi; and news about Ladysmith and Gallipoli had yet to be made: British expansionism was not entirely altruistic. Wells’ *The War of the Worlds* asks what would happen if tables were turned and Mother England became the target of foreign incursion, adding the town of Woking to the list of military shame?

Wells may not have consulted Veblen’s scholarship, but some of Veblen’s ideas are in Wells’ stories. Several are apparent and are presented in combined forms.

### **Wealth, Poverty, and Class Structure**

The Time Traveler may not actually be a member of the leisure class, but there are hints that he approximates it. He lives comfortably with domestic help. The occupations of his friends are identified and Veblen reports that such social homogamy among the privileged is normal rather than exceptional. The Time Traveler and his friends disagree politely about the efficacy of the Time Machine, and all are dedicated to punctuality as a form of respect to each others' schedules. This Veblenian trait is symbolized by the many clocks in the Time Traveler's house in Wells' *The Time Machine* and in Palma's *The Map of Time*.

Veblen had also concluded that underprivileged classes held enormous leverage over the privileged, making those who are socially and financially secure inept and susceptible to changed opinions among the underprivileged. The reader of Wells is left to wonder if the Time Traveler could perform his duties as a host without his hired help. Wells further explores this question where social power between the Eloi and the Morlocks is reversed.

Veblen notes that a historical calling of the privileged is to preserve cultural artifacts in such cultural features as museums, galleries, and libraries, yet the Eloi have abandoned this duty, and all others for that matter. The Morlocks became the caretakers of humanity's material and intellectual traditions, but they did so recklessly and the Time Traveler found them in shambles. What would happen, "What if ...?" asks Wells, "if the underclasses became empowered over the privileged?"

### **Techgnosticism**

The Time Traveler had invented a machine that could seemingly perform an impossible task, one that held humankind's curiosity for eons—the ability to travel through time. Humans pass through time, of course, almost imperceptibly, but here was a device that would allow them to move instantaneously through time, into the past and into the future. Not only could they move backward and revise history, but they could

also move forward and change the future. While such activities are fraught with danger and benefits, the story elicits two questions: "Could the heretofore impossible become possible?" and "Would or should a Time Traveler change events?", yet other practical questions plagued Wells.

"Why didn't...?" asked Wells, England's industrial-military machinery build weapons that could defeat the Martians? Religious leaders are weak and frail, so would God come directly to rescue humankind? What would happen if real invaders had natural immuno-defense systems that the Martians lacked? "What if...?" asked Wells.

### **Finding Veblen in Palma**

Whoever reads Palma's books should also be familiar with Wells' two stories, Jack the Ripper, and Poe's sole novel *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* (1837/1960). Working knowledge of astrophysics' theories about time-space travel, the "Hollow Earth" theory, concentrated reading with a lively imagination, and some understanding of Veblen would be helpful to the ambitious reader. Palma's familiarity with Veblen is only speculative, but Veblen is clearly present in Palma's layered stories.

### **Wealth, Poverty, and Class Structure**

*The Map of Time* begins with a young man's romance with a prostitute who is eventually killed by Jack the Ripper. The victim was not an employee of London's finer bordellos, but she was a streetwalker in the White Chapel neighborhood, the "mean streets" of East London. Prostitutes there were often substance abusers and unclean so their customers took many risks. Such encounters were often rites of passage for young and privileged men, but the couplings were never intended to be permanent ones. The women could not have been brought into "polite" society, even though the portrait of the prostitute was prominently displayed in the house of the young man's father.

The actors in the staged production of time travel were not the stars that fill the glossy magazines and entertainment television shows of today. The performers, even the

reveled Shackleton, would be only called “extras” in today’s language, hoping for recognition but with other jobs to keep them employed regularly. Their employer became rich as he appealed to the gullibility of the privileged and hoodwinked them.

### ***The Role of Women***

Veblen offered a summary statement about women. They were inconsequential, but they were also expected to behave according to status norms, and Palma made good use of these conduct codes in the portrayals of five prominent women in his stories.

Wells was married twice in real life and in the portrayed one, and his first marriage was disappointing. The second one, to Jane, was more companionable, intimate, satisfying, and traditional even though it had origins in infidelity and impropriety. Jane was dutiful and supportive, abiding the expectations of the time, but there was also a romantic side to her. When two separate men approached her husband for advice and help—one dealing with the murdered prostitute, and the other with a woman who fell in love with a man who did not exist—Jane was a co-conspirator in the schemes to provide inner peace for the supplicants.

Then there were the two socialites who appreciated social decorum, and had yen for adventure. The first was in *The Map of Time* where she was fascinated with tales of an ingenious company that had developed a machine that could take people into the future, where she wanted to be with Shackleton. The second was in *The Map of the Sky* where she was reluctantly attracted to the suitor who claimed that he could make Wells’ fiction a reality. The first was polite and demure, yet violated sexual norms of the era; and the second was vocal about family heritage and those whose wealth was not old. More conspicuously, however, both were drawn to men beneath their social stations as overt disregard for social mores about propriety.

The fourth portrayal was the household maid of the New York socialite. She was sent with notes to and from the suitor with little or

no concern for the frequency of the trips, their hardship, the hour, or the weather. She was, after all, just the hired help. The fifth illustrative woman was the murdered prostitute whose portrait hid her marriage, her residential neighborhood, her occupation, and her personal habit of drunkenness. As a member of the poverty class, she was used by the privileged and dismissed by most of them.

### ***Techgnosticism***

O’Sullivan introduces the term in the context of modern electronics communications devices, but fascination with new technologies is timeless. The stories by Wells and by Palma take place in an era when technological innovations were being made with exponential progress and England was the epicenter for the Industrial Revolution. Wells used this information in both books, as did Palma, especially in *The Map of Time*.

As that story unfolds, pianolas or player pianos were popular toys of entertainment, and these self-operating technologies led to the creation of other household and self-propelled devices. These robots eventually became intelligent and able to communicate with each other, becoming disparaged with their diminutive positions and lack of appreciation. They eventually conspired and revolted under the leadership of Solomon, killing many and taking control over their owners who had become weak and ineffectual. A world war between humans and machines came to an end in the year 2000 when Shackleton killed Solomon.

The crafty charlatan created a “Time Machine” and became rich from the passengers who wanted to visit the future and witness this fight. Travelers paid handsomely for the machine to make several trips into the future. The trickster was well aware of the possible interactive effects between constructed mediated realities and perceived mediated realities about the unknown, but knowing that his notoriety had faded and that his profits were great and secured, he faked his death and left town.

### ***The Phenomenological***

The “Hollow Earth Theory” states that there are two holes in the Earth’s crust that lead to a verdant subterranean universe whose accesses are supposedly located at the North and South poles. Beliefs in the place and its entryways have been the bases for many fictional explorations.

One opening is supposedly “found” in Palma’s first book, but it is located in central Africa rather than at either of its traditional locations. A huckster publicizes its discovery, it becomes the rage of conversation and economic speculation, and Queen Victoria orders a summer home to be built in the idyllic locale. The other hole is being sought in Palma’s second book by the ill-fated expedition to Antarctica, and one of the exploration’s crew members, Poe, later writes a bizarre tale that ends with a voyager who disappears in a large atmospheric maw.

Palma’s books are filled with Veblenian examples and readers of this article are encouraged to find them, independently. It is time now to assess Collins’ trilogy.

### **Finding Veblen in Collins**

Both media outlets of the stories are controversial and visually dramatic in several ways. Their portrayals of totalitarianism is compared to George Orwell’s *Animal Farm* (1946/1962) and *Nineteen Eighty-four* (1949/1961) and to Ray Bradbury’s 1953 *Fahrenheit 451*. The child-to-child violence is reminiscent of William Golding’s *The Lord of the Flies* from 1954. Finally, the theatrical march of the charioteers in the 1959 film adaptation of Lew Wallace’s *Ben-Hur* (1880) is replicated in the movie version of the *The Hunger Games* as Katniss and Peeta make their public debut riding a horse-drawn chariot for the cheering crowd: Katniss’ costume is ablaze with artificial fire. This article now looks into the stories for evidence of Veblen’s sociology.

### **Wealth and Power**

Panem’s social class structure has two main divisions: The “haves” who reside in the Capitol and the “have nots” who live the Districts. While class gradations in the

Capitol are not specified, there are several occupational groupings including President Snow, other elitists, the Gamemakers, media personalities, the games’ control room technicians, the Tributes’ escorts, and the Tributes’ attendants. Beyond President Snow, however, clear class distinctions in the Capitol are not as important as the infinite social power that is wielded by the Capitol over the Districts. Their people were beaten in their historic revolt and the Hunger Games represent absolute control over, and retribution toward, the masses, but Katniss Everdeen beat the system. She defied President Snow, who would not tolerate being upstaged by an imprudent and impudent girl. For him, losing was never an acceptable outcome.

### **Conspicuous Consumption**

The village of Katniss and Peeta is poor. Their exposure to the wealth of the Capitol is described in the opulence of the train that carries them to the Capitol and in clothing that residents of the Capitol wear. The movie version of *The Hunger Games* greatly enhanced Collins’ written imagery, making it obvious that neither Katniss nor Peeta have anything to consume conspicuously. Even when the games’ survivors return home, the rewards offered them, their towns, and families are merely palliative appeasements –“bread and circuses”– while the Districts, towns, and families of the slain children receive nothing.

### **Sports and Luck**

As Hunger Games training progresses, the Tributes are given opportunities to show, or hide, any survival skills they may have. Each Tribute is then ranked and such a scale provides the elites wagering odds on, or against, the combatants. It also offers possible assistance for Tributes. Their trainers, former survivors, petition sponsors for emergency supplies when in jeopardy, making supported survivors valuable in two ways. The financial return on good wagering is self-evident, and the social esteem that is accorded to those Capitol elitists whose selective breeding allows them to sort

winner from loser, and the strong from the weak, is beyond monetary value.

Residents of the Tributes' Districts want their children to live, and most residents of the Capitol want the children to die. While aforementioned catch-phrase of the games is primarily directed toward the Tributes, this interpretation suggests that it may also apply to those who bet on the Tributes who they selfishly want to live.

### **About Women**

There is no doubt that Katniss Everdeen is center stage throughout the troubling trilogy, but there is another woman, Effie Trinket, whose effusive mien and self image are important to notice. Effie has a parallel presence in the maid of the New York City socialite in Palma's *Map of the Sky*; they are both minions of the privileged, but Effie works for Panem's Capitol. She is its representative and emcee for District 12's Reaping where she selects their Tributes. After that, she is the escort/chaperone for Katniss and Peeta as they navigate all the public exposure in preparation for the Hunger Games. Effie is probably not a member of the Capitol's elite, but engages in exaggerated imitations of them. As her name implies, she is a social bauble— a trinket.

Effie is punctilious, punctual, and supercilious. She pays close attention to details and propriety. She is always conscious of clothing fashion and her presentation of self to others— traits that are alien to the impoverished and practical *gemeinschaft* of District 12. If Veblen was poking fun at the leisure class then Collins' caricature of the elite serves the same purpose. A comparison between the frivolous Effie and the practical Katniss clearly shows a Veblenian differentiation of women's status-role sets and the social backgrounds from which Effie and Katniss hail.

Katniss is a good hunter because her father trained her as an archer and a tracker. She is bold and determined because the hunt takes her onto government property for which she would be prosecuted as a trespasser and a poacher. She is also the primary provider of food for her family after her mother became

listless and emotionally inept upon the death of her husband when he and fellow workers were vaporized in a coal mine explosion. Katniss' mother plies her skills at folk medicine, but depends much on Katniss' success, emotional stability, and rationality.

Primrose is young, inexperienced, lacking predatory and survival tenacity, and would be instant fodder on the games' killing fields. She is eligible for selection at her first Reaping and is chosen, prompting her older sister to volunteer to replace her. Katniss' valor was immediately hailed by those who only watch the Hunger Games, while silently honored by people of the Seam. She feels much anguish as she is forced to transfer her hunting skills from wild game to human targets.

### **Techgnosticism**

The games occur in artificial arenas that vary each year, and all are embedded with technological gadgets. Such devices include hidden cameras and microphones so the Tributes' actions can be watched and overheard. Artificially created or genetically altered animals inhabit the arenas. Environmental conditions are manipulated by Gamemakers and technicians. The games are broadcast to the Capitol and to the Districts on large viewing screens, and the Tributes are notified of their competitors' progress via images projected in the sky. The children are injected with electronic tracking devices that also signal their deaths and locations for body removal. Panem's leisure class loved its power, privileges, and electronic toys all at the expense of the underprivileged Districts.

## **DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSION**

Social classes are nominal categories of lifestyle differences that are made ordinal with evaluation and rating criteria. Making them interval categories is more difficult because there are no universal means to quantify and separate them. A crude measurement tool could be income tax levels where a lower class exists beneath the poverty level, an upper class exists at the

highest tax rate for earnings, and a middle class is comprised of all others. The sizes and compositions of these categories vary, however, by way of means-testing, tax codes, and economic fluctuations. Veblen may have been aware of these objective difficulties via his ethnologies using instead qualitative variables to identify some of the habits of the leisure class as stylized impression management.

Even so, entry into the leisure class to make overt and unobtrusive observations of their lifestyles would have been difficult for the most ardent intruder. If Veblen's contributions are based more on impressions than actual knowledge, his conclusions would be suspect, allowing the casual student of sociology to question its methods, findings, and honorifics accorded to him. Rosenberg noted his informal classroom manner and his students would have noticed such demeanor, belying the expectation of energetic and competent instruction that would inspire further curiosity. When criteria for social-class membership and lifestyles, for example, are discussed as being squishy with imprecision, students might ask "Why bother?" and walk away perplexed instead of being inspired.

If absolute findings about social classes are hard to find, then where can students find their lessons? There are three places where they can look. The first is their home communities because all will have families that are locally wealthy, families that are locally needy, and other families between the extremes. A second place to look is the college that the students attend. Admission to many schools is competitive, so a quantified meritocracy is present and obvious. The very titles of freshmen, sophomores, juniors, seniors, and graduate students indicate academic success and progress, just as instructors and administrators are ranked and promoted. Seniors have seminars and independent study sections with full professors whereas freshmen have lecture halls with adjunct instructors; and, such scholastic labels as "honor student" and "dean's list" are markers of good habits, but "academic probation" and "final pro" are

opposing indices. The third place to look is in literature, as is shown here and elsewhere.

Veblen may have been rebuking the leisure class. If so, he seems to have friends in Wells, in Collins, and perhaps in Parma, directing us to classical and modern literature as sources for finding sociology outside journals, textbooks, and lecture halls. Novels can be read with a new dedication providing an alternative way to understand and appreciate sociology's paradigms, findings, and purposes. Since novelists often use sociology to support their mediated realities for entertainment, sociologists can use those very creations to support their mediated realities for education.

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