

'a sound of thunder'
and 'the man who
could work miracles'
essay sample



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

'A Sound of Thunder' and 'The Man Who Could Work Miracles' are short science fiction stories by Ray Bradbury and H. G. Wells. 'A Sound of Thunder' is about time travel, set in the year 2050. It is the story of a man who goes on a hunting trip back in time to shoot a tyrannosaurus rex but ends up changing the past, as well as the present when things go wrong. 'The Man Who Could Work Miracles' is about a man named Fotheringay trying to prove his belief that miracles can not just happen but must be willed, and much to his surprise demonstrates this to all the people around him.

He then goes on to use his power to perform various tasks, but ends up destroying life on Earth with a careless miracle. Both stories give morals to the reader about messing around with the forces of nature and the consequences that can happen if you do. This essay will explore the differences and similarities between the two stories, concentrating on how they begin and end. Ray Bradbury was born in 1920 in Illinois and moved frequently during his childhood. Throughout his childhood he suffered from nightmares, but later in his life he made these experiences more positive by drawing on them as inspiration for his writing.

He began writing during his youth, his work consisting entirely of science fiction. It is likely that the space race which was going on during the 40s, 50s, and 60s also helped influence his work and interest in science. Bradbury wrote many short stories, poems, novels, and films, such as 'Fahrenheit 452' and 'The Martian Chronicles', as well as writing for T. V. Aware of the popularity of his work for transformation into films of television programmes, Bradbury uses very cinematic descriptions in his writing, which can easily be

imagined on the screen. H. G. Wells (Herbert George) was born in 1866 in Kent.

His interest in books and writing developed early in his childhood when he broke his leg, and while convalescing, read everything that he could. Later on, he won a scholarship to the 'Normal School of Science' in London, where he met Professor Huxley – a biologist. Wells became a good friend of the professor and also extremely interested in biology. This interest is clearly shown through his writing, such as in 'Island of Dr. Moreau', 'War of the Worlds', and 'Invisible Man'. Some of his other science fictions works include 'Time Machine' and 'The Shape of Things to Come'.

At the time Wells was writing, during the Victorian period, short stories were popular for publication in magazines in serial form. Some of his stories were used in this way along with the work of other authors of the time. 'A Sound of Thunder' has quite a conventional structure with a clearly defined beginning, middle and end. The introduction to this story is relatively short, although it contains a lot of detail on the appearance of the office. This is important later on in the story when they return from the time safari, as it is used to make comparisons and show what has changed.

Then there is the incitement, when Eckels gets into the time machine for the first time to go on the safari. Suspense is created from the beginning of the story and builds gradually towards the climax, where Eckels is on his knees at the end, and there is 'a sound of thunder'. The suspense is mostly created by Eckels' actions, as he proceeds to make more and more mistakes and become more nervous as the story progresses. It builds suspense, as the

reader knows sooner or later something big is going to happen, although you are not quite sure what, or when it will occur.

The actual ending itself when there is 'a sound of thunder' creates the most suspense as it is so dramatic, but then you never find out what happens.

There is not really a resolution in this story, as the problems that have occurred do not get solved. We are left without a definite ending or explanation. Although the story comes to an end it doesn't feel like the action is over, or the event has finished. The structure of 'The Man Who Could Work Miracles' is quite noticeably different to 'A Sound of Thunder'; firstly as it is a pantoum in prose meaning Wells lets us know the outcome right at the start.

The ending is much more defined than in 'A Sound of Thunder' as there is a clear resolution in the story to the problems that Fotheringay causes. 'The Man Who Could Work Miracles' starts with quite a long introduction in comparison to 'A Sound of Thunder' although it is just as detailed, if not perhaps more so. The description in 'The Man Who Could Work Miracles' however is focused on the main character, Fotheringay, rather than his surroundings as it is in 'A Sound of Thunder'. In the 'The Man Who Could Work Miracles' the suspense is build up much more slowly than in 'A Sound of Thunder'.

In this story it is build with the increase in size of Fotheringay's miracles. We see early on with the small tasks that he needs to be very specific about what he wants to happen; otherwise it can all go wrong. An example of this is the miracle he performs with the walking stick, which then causes him

problems with Winch. As we know this, we realise that the bigger the miracle he performs, the larger the risk, and the more that can go wrong. This builds the suspense, as we know eventually at the climax something has to go terribly wrong. Then there is the ending, which is the same as the beginning.

H. G. Wells has used this as the resolution to this story, as Fotheringay just wills everything to be as it was before and for him to be back at the beginning of the story. 'A Sound of Thunder' begins with the main character, Eckels, in the office of Time Safari Inc. The story is being told in the present tense, and the narrator starts by describing the sign in the office, "The sign on the wall seemed to quaver under a film of sliding warm water." Although the language used is descriptive, it is not very complicated, and is easy to understand.

The reader can effortlessly start to visualise the scene that is being described almost immediately. The style of the language is very modern, as the story was not written that long ago. This is an example of Bradbury's cinematic style of writing. It catches the readers' eye even before they have started to read the story, as it looks interesting and unusual on the page. The sign is used to introduce the theme of the story, as it makes it obvious that this is going to be about time travel and one of these hunting safaris. This means the main plot can then start straight away, as the reader is already aware of what is happening.

It cuts down on the amount of explanation and description needed of the setting and circumstances, which could become boring. It helps build excitement right from the start. The beginning of this story is quite dramatic

as right away suspense begins to build. The obvious nervousness of Eckels conveys tension to the reader. When Eckels asks, " Does this safari guarantee I come back alive? " this hints to the reader that something is likely to go wrong later in the story, as there is so much risk apparently involved in the safari that the official says, " We guarantee nothing.

The second story, " The Man Who Could Work Miracles", begins by looking back at events that have already happened in the past, " It is doubtful whether the gift was innate... ". From the start, the language is much more complex and harder to understand, as it was written around half a century before ' A Sound of Thunder'. Within the first three sentences it is already outlined almost exactly what is to happen in the story, basically telling the reader that this character, who is not yet named, acquires " miraculous powers" and can thereafter work miracles.

At the time this story was written there was a lot of uncertainty about the future, as people were frightened about what would happen when the new century came. It is likely that because of this H. G. Wells tries to reassure the reader by making it obvious early on in his story that the outcome will be good. If the narrator is talking about events in the past, it must mean that what ever happened in the story was not catastrophic because he is still there to tell the tale. He briefly tells the reader what is to happen in the main part of the story so there are not really any surprises later on.

This is similar to the ' A Sound of Thunder' as we are also given some hints as to what may happen in the story at the beginning, but it is also very different to ' A Sound of Thunder' as it does not start with the same tense

atmosphere and with as much excitement. The mood of 'The Man Who Could Work Miracles' is much calmer and more laid back than 'A Sound of Thunder' at the start. Another difference is when the actual 'story' starts to be told. In 'The Man Who Could Work Miracles', it is told right from the very beginning, with Fotheringay sitting in the pub.

The reader can follow the entire plot through easily like this, with tension and suspense being built up gradually throughout, rather than the reader being introduced later, as in 'A Sound of Thunder' when an atmosphere has already been created. People reading at the time of 'A Sound of Thunder' would be more comfortable to deal with this than if H. G. Wells had started his story in this way. People in his time would be more likely to have been unsettled by this uncertainty. Another difference between the two stories, immediately and probably most noticeable at the beginning is the way in which they are narrated.

'A Sound of Thunder' is narrated in the third person. It gives the story a somewhat cold feeling, as there is not really a figure you can identify with as the storyteller. The narrator and the action are very much disconnected as it is written as if the narrator is looking over the action from a distance. 'The Man Who Could Work Miracles' is narrated in the first person, which gives a much closer feeling to it. The reader can identify the narrator as an actual person and it is as if the narrator is almost part of the action, but not quite - just watching what is happening from very close by.

The narrator of this sounds like just an ordinary person that happened to be in the pub at the time when the story began. The effect of this on the reader

is that they can imagine the story more clearly, as it is from a point of view. It also helps to make the story more believable for the reader. However, the fact that it is narrated in the first person also means that we are restricted to seeing everything from that person's point of view. In 'A Sound of Thunder' we get a wider view of events than in 'The Man Who Could Work Miracles' as we are not restricted one person's opinions on events.

The ending of 'A Sound of Thunder' is very dramatic, and is left as a cliff hanger. The characters' worst fears, of changing time have come true and now their own 'present' is different to the way they left it before the safari. On the journey back through time after Eckels has stepped off the path, Travis has threatened to shoot him if anything has been changed. When it becomes obvious that it has, the suspense is immediately intensified. The reader wants to know how Travis will react. The sentences become very quick and short, with lots of punctuation, especially in the last paragraph. Eckels moaned.

He dropped to his knees. He scrabbled at the golden butterfly with shaking fingers. "Can't we," he pleaded to the world, to himself, to the officials, to the Machine, "can't we take it back, can't we make it alive again? Can't we start over? Can't we-" The atmosphere is tense as Eckels, on his knees, begs for his life with Travis. Then Travis lifts his rifle and "there was a sound of thunder". The reader immediately jumps to the conclusion that Travis has shot Eckels as he threatened, but then when you think about it more you realise it has been left as a cliff hanger.

Eckels being shot is not the only possible ending. It is possible that Travis shot himself, so he does not have to live in this new world. We already know a different and unpopular, "anti-everything man... a militarist, anti-Christ, anti-human, anti-intellectual" won the election in comparison to the popular candidate of before, so maybe Travis thinks life will be so awful that he just ends it. Maybe he does not want to live with the guilt of having changed the whole of history. Even though he personally was not the one that stepped off the path, he was still part of it.

Another possibility is that the sound of thunder is not a gunshot at all. Perhaps dinosaurs never died out because Eckels stepped on that one butterfly, and the sound of thunder is actually a dinosaur, as this is how the dinosaur was introduced earlier, "Suddenly it all ceased, as if someone had shut a door. Silence. A sound of thunder. Out of the mist, one hundred yards away, came Tyrannosaurus Rex." This ending is good as it leaves the reader thinking about all the possibilities, and allows them to make up their own mind how the story actually does end.

Because you keep thinking about this, you remember the story, but also remember the moral contained in it - not to play with the forces of nature, as you never know what may happen. The uncertain ending also helps reinforce not knowing what will happen if you change nature, as you never do find out what really happens. The moral in this story is portrayed in a particularly strong way with this ending, as you realise the whole of history has been changed and can never be changed back to how it was before. The people that have travelled through time have to live with their mistake forever.