

# H.g. wells`s time machine critical essay

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The Protagonist: The novel's protagonist, identified only as the Time Traveller, is essentially a scientist and inventor. He is very scientifically minded, and comes out as a character whose life is dedicated to scientific advancement and understanding the nature of the world and life. Reason is central to his outlook of the world. In his investigations, he has stumbled upon some radical insights in the structure of reality, which lead him to build his fantastic time machine.

The initial events: The novel begins as the Time Traveller invites his friends to inspect his new invention - a time machine. He explains the idea to them...

There are really four dimensions, three which we call the three planes of Space, and a fourth, Time... There is no difference between Time and any of the three dimensions of Space except that our consciousness moves along it.

(1)

Scientists and mathematicians have been talking about a possible fourth dimension before him, but our inventor rightly identifies the fourth dimension not with an extra spatial dimension but with time. He then shows his friends a small model of his invention — a metallic frame with ivory and quartz parts. One lever can propel it toward the future, and another can reverse the direction. He helps one of his friends push the future lever, and the model promptly disappears. Where did it go? It did not move in space at all; it simply went to another time, the Time Traveller explains. His friends cannot decide whether to believe him.

Next, the Time Traveller takes his friends to his home laboratory, to see his nearly complete, full-scale model. A week later he finishes the time machine, climbs aboard, and begins a remarkable journey to the future. The narrative is recounted in flash back, after the Time Traveller is back from his adventures.

Seated in his time machine, the Time Traveller first presses the future lever gently forward. Then he presses the one for stopping. He looks at his lab. Everything is the same. Then he notices the clock: " A moment before, as it seemed, it had stood at a minute or so past ten; now it was nearly half-past three!" He pushes the lever ahead again, and he can see his housekeeper flit across the room at high speed. Then he pushes the lever far forward.

The night came like the turning out of a light, and in another moment came tomorrow.... As I put on a pace, night followed day like the flapping of a black wing... Presently, as I went on, still gaining velocity, the palpitation of night and day merged into one continuous grayness... I saw huge buildings rise up faint and fair, and pass likedreams. (1)

Eventually, the Time Traveller brings his vehicle to a stop. The machine's dials show that he has arrived in the year 802, 701. What does he find?

The Conflict: In the distant future where the Time Traveller lands, the human race has split into two species: one, brutish and mean, living below ground — the Morlocks; the other, childlike and gentle, living above ground — the Eloi. The central conflict of the novel revolves around these two groups. The Time Traveller identifies himself with the Eloi, at least to a degree, and among them he finds a lovely young woman named Weena, whom he befriends.

Weena can be considered as the protagonist's love interest. But soon he discovers, to his horror, that the troglodytes living below are cannibals and prey on the Eloi. Several adventures follow. The action scene of peak importance is the Time Traveller reclaiming his Time Machine stolen by the Morlocks escaping.

The Climax: The novel has a kind of apocalyptic climax/anticlimax. Escaping from the Morlocks, the protagonist pushes the lever into the extreme forward position. By the time he is able to bring the machine under control, he has moved into the far future. Mammals have become extinct, and only some crablike creatures and butterflies remain on Earth. He explores as far as 30 million years into the future, where he discovers a dull red Sun and lichen-like vegetation; the only animal life in evidence is a football-shaped creature with tentacles. Wells's Time Traveller witnesses the end of the world, and apocalyptic vision that he carries back to the present. His revelation of finiteness implies that we can expect and must accept an end to life, an inevitable doomsday.

The Epilogue: The Time Traveller then returns to his own time and to his friends. As proof of his experience in the future, he produces a couple of flowers Weena had given him, of a type unknown to his friends. After talking to his friends, the Time Traveller departs on his time machine and never returns. The narrator wonders about his fate. Where did he go? Did he return to the future or go instead to some prehistoric realm?

The bulk of the story is told from the viewpoint of the Time Traveller. The substance of the story is, however, framed within the narration of one of Time Traveller's guests. This guest, the frame narrator, introduces the Time  
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Traveller and lets him relate his adventure in an inset narrative. The frame narrator's outside viewpoint carries a degree of objectivity and gives credibility to the inventor's inset narrative. He grounds the story in a reality with which the audience can identify before and after experiencing the wondrous trip in the time machine. With the return to familiar surroundings, the reader, like the Time Traveller, might question the reality of such a strange experience (" Is it all only a dream? They say life is a dream..."), but the presence of an honorable gentleman in the form of frame narrator gives more plausibility to the narrative of the protagonist who is by nature a dreamer and a visionary.

Wells's inventor's interest in time traveling seems primarily for the sake of scientific accomplishment, to gain knowledge for knowledge's sake. H. G. Wells' story begins with, and constantly refers back to, the time machine itself. However, the machine is simply a device allowing the author to present his own perspective on a possible future. The main thrust of the story lies in this form of forecasting and prediction and also in the social comment about the conflicts between different classes or kinds of society. The main intent is not so much to explore the questions of time, but to illustrate the ultimate possible consequence of social and economic divisions of humanity. Thus, this story can be seen more as a social and political criticism than sciencefiction.

The Time Traveller does not have a definite cause and effect explanation for the Eloi's society. To shape his theories he relies on the scientific method, using empirical evidence to reach conclusion that he reformulates with the discovery of new information. However, his inconclusive conclusions are

largely conjectures. The Time Traveller bases his hypotheses on socioeconomic conditions and theories (especially socialism) prevalent in his own period of the late nineteenth century, and on a metaphorical image of the capitalist and worker. Without knowledge of some causal chain, he lacks definite information to show what other variable elements may have affected mankind to produce the bifurcation of the human species and the predator-prey relationship of the Morlock and Eloi.

While such ambiguities raise many unanswerable questions, the message that comes out of them is clear: any kind of widening gap between groups of human race can prove costly in the end. The novel also answers one thing most directly: Eventually there will not be a trace of humanity left, the earth will become desolate and barren. The vision of the end of the world is perhaps the most haunting and yet the most enlightening aspect of this work, to me. I also wonder how it would have been if the Time Traveller pushed further, if only to catch the briefest glimpse into eternity.

No idea from science fiction has captured the human imagination as much as time travel. We seem free to move around in space at will, but in time we are like helpless rafters in a mighty stream, propelled into the future at the rate of one second per second. One wishes one could sometimes paddle ahead to investigate the shores of the future, or perhaps turn around and go against the current to visit the past. The hope that such freedom will one day be ours is sustained when we observe that many feats formerly thought impossible have now been realized and are even taken for granted.

When Wells wrote *The Time Machine* in 1895, many people thought that heavier-than-air flying machines were impossible. But just eight years later

the Wright brothers proved the skeptics wrong. Flights to the Moon too strictly belonged to the realm of fantasy - until Apollo program achieved it. Might time travel be similar? Wells's swift-paced classic science fiction tale challenges us to dare to dream the impossible. The idea of time travel gained prominence through Wells's wonderful novel. Most remarkable is his treatment of time as a fourth dimension, which uncannily anticipates Einstein's use of the concept several years later.

Interestingly, the Time Machine was Wells' first novel, and enjoyed an instant popularity, rescuing its author from obscurity and poverty. Today it stands as one of the greatest pioneering science fiction tales. I would like to read Jules Verne's A Journey to the Moon after this.

#### References:

1. Wells H. G. (1898). The Time Machine. Retrieved May 10 2007 from <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/35/35.txt>