H. G. Wells, The Time Machine

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Additional Materials

Orson Welles Meets H.G. Wells - A very interesting meeting between literary giants Orson Welles and H. G. Wells. Originally aired on Radio KTSA San Antonio on October 28, 1940

War of The Worlds - University of Iowa Wiki on H. G. Well's War of the Worlds.

The H.G. Wells Society - Founded in 1961, the H.G. Wells society's main objective is to raise interest in the author's life and work. In addition to publishing an annual journal on Wells, The Wellsian, the society also posts up to date information on publications and events relating to Wells and his work.

H.G. Wells: 9 Predictions That Have, and Haven't Come True - A National Geographic article from 2010 discussing some of H. G. Well's technological predictions from the cell phone to the heat ray.
This is the title page from the first edition of *The Time Machine*.

**Biography**

Dates: September 21, 1866 - August 13, 1946  
Hometown: Bromley, Kent County, England

**Video on H. G. Wells’ biography**

http://www.biography.com/people/h-g-wells-39224/videos/h-g-wells-full-episode-207324490
Herbert George Well's first novel was *The Time Machine*. His parents were Sarah Neal, maid to the upper classes, and Joseph Wells, shopkeeper and professional cricket player.

In 1874, he was bedridden with a broken leg, leading his father to keep him entertained by giving him books to read in bed. After a basic education at a local school, Wells was apprenticed as a draper. Wells disliked the work and in 1883 became a pupil-teacher at Midhurst Grammar School.

While at Midhurst Wells won a scholarship to the School of Science where he was taught biology by T. H. Huxley. Wells found Huxley an inspiring teacher and as a result developed a strong interest in evolution. Wells founded and edited the Science Schools Journal while at university. Wells was disappointed with the teaching he received in the second year and so in 1887 he left without obtaining a degree.

Wells spent the next few years teaching and writing and in 1891 his major essay on science, The Rediscovery of the Unique, was published in The Fortnightly Review. In 1895 Wells established himself as a novelist in 1895 with his science fiction story, *The Time Machine*. This was followed by two more successful novels, *The Island of Dr. Moreau* (1896) and *The War of the Worlds* (1898).

Later in life, after marrying his cousin, Isabel Mary Wells, in 1891, he ran off in 1895 and married one of his past pupils, Amy Catherine Robbins, known as Jane. After becoming sick, he built a large family home in Sandgate in 1901. That same year, Jane bore him a son named George Philip and two years later Frank Richard.

During their marriage, Wells also had relations with several other women. Two of which bore him sons: writer Amber Reeves gave birth to their daughter Anna Jane in 1909 and in 1914 author and feminist Rebecca West gave birth to their son Anthony West.

His marriage to Jane lasted until her death in 1927. H. G. Wells died on 13 August 1946 at his home in Regent’s Park, London.
Though *The Time Machine* as we know it was published in 1895 through Heineman, several earlier incarnations of the time traveling story existed and were included in various publications. The first time traveling story written by Wells was the *Chr onic Argonauts*, printed in several installments between April and June, 1888. In this unfinished version, Dr. Nebogipfel constructs a time machine in the previously abandoned estate known as Manse to the inhabitants of the village Lyddwdd. His antisocial behavior and odd noises and lights originating from his house raises suspicion in the villagers and they gather to confront him at his home, when he activates the Time Machine and disappears along with the local reverend Cook.
Another published manifestation of the tale appeared several years later in the National Observer in 1894. This version begins similarly to *The Time Machine* in that the Time Traveller, referred to in this account as the Philosophical Inventor, is lecturing his dinner guests on his theories of the spatial three dimensions and the temporal fourth dimension. After one of the guests mentions the Time Machine, the Philosophical Inventor recounts the experience of time travel and leads them to the Time Machine, where he details his trip to the year 12,203. The story then follows a similar vein to *The Time Machine* where the protagonist meets with the frivolous Eloi and the subterranean Morlocks before returning back to his time period. The ending of this version places more speculation onto the split of humanity into the Morlocks and Eloi, with the Philosophical Inventor claiming the Eloi to be the descendants of the aristocratic leisure class of his contemporaries and the Morlocks the downtrodden labor class. The National Observer version of *The Time Machine* also remained unfinished as Wells left the paper before publishing an ending.

### Character List

**The Time Traveller**: the main character in this story and a scientist. He has invented a time machine and takes it forward into the future to find what has become of mankind. He invites several dinner guests to the first previewing of his invention, the Time Machine, and then another set of guests to his homecoming. He eventually disappears at the end of the novella, leading the reader and the Narrator to wonder what happened to him.

**Weena**: one of the Eloi that the Time Traveller gets to know and love. He initially saves her from drowning, causing her to follow him like a puppy for the rest of the time he is there. She dies in the fire that the Traveller created in defense of the Morlocks. She is different from the other Eloi in that she cries (Chapter 5) and expresses her gratitude by giving him flowers. Yet, she is also very similar to the other Eloi in that she is not very smart, tires easily, and has a childish admiration for fire. There is some debate on whether the love between the Traveller and Weena is romantic or paternal. Both exchange kisses and hugs, but as the Traveller consistently refers to her as a child, the relationship is considered paternal.
The Morlocks: ape-like creatures that live underground and are essentially the "working-class." They are nocturnal and breed the Eloi, the "upper-class", for food. They are called by the Traveller:

- Human spider (Chapter 5)
- New vermin (Chapter 6)
- Nauseatingly inhuman (Chapter 6)
- Human rats (Chapter 9)
- Damned souls (Chapter 9)

Yet, even though he calls them such, he also has a little smidgen of praise to give them: "[they] retained...more initiative" and even "some little thought outside habit" (Chapter 10). Compared to the Eloi who are not only lazy, but idiotic. His choice words for them are:

- Very beautiful and graceful (3.14)
- Hectic beauty (3.14)
- Fragile thing (4.1)
- Pretty little people (4.2)
- Dresden-china type of prettiness (4.3)

Critics have discussed where the two species' names came from and one has come up with the notion that they came from the Bible. Morlock sounds a lot like Moloch, which is the name of a Phoenician god associated with child sacrifice in the Bible. "Mors" is also a Latin root for "death." Then, Eloi sounds a lot like Elohim, which is a Hebrew word for god. Second, in the Gospel of Mark, Jesus yells out from the cross, "Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?" Translated as: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" This makes it seem as though the Eloi are also named after a god.

The Narrator: this character is used as a stand-in for the reader. Very unobtrusive and isn't seen from the 3rd or 4th chapter on until the end of the book. Is the only one of the dinner guests to believe in the Time Traveller and is one of the Traveller's "more constant guests".

There is speculation that the Narrator actually may have cause the continued disappearance of the Time Traveller, or, possibly, his death. In Chapter 12, the Narrator goes in to look at the machine by himself. He touches a lever and the machine sways. It startles him and reminds him of his childhood days when he was told not to meddle. Could it be that the Narrator somehow tampered with the Time Machine causing it to malfunction? Is that the reason for the Time Traveller not being able to return?

The Dinner Guests: several of them are invited to two separate dinners: pre- and post-time traveling. They are the epitome of the upper class and what the Time Traveller sees as becoming the Eloi.
Amongst the first dinner guests are: Filby, the Psychologist, a very young man, the Provincial Mayor, the Medical Man, and the Narrator. The ones that were invited to the second dinner were: the Medical Man (the Doctor), the Editor of a well-known daily paper, the Journalist, the Psychologist, the Silent Man, and the Narrator. The only other character that seems to be missing (in order to represent all of society) is a man of religion. Throughout the book, there is no mention of religion, so it seems plausible to assume that since Wells was not a religious man, he didn’t find it necessary to include any sort of religion in the Time Traveller’s story nor have a man of religion present when he told the story. Wells was a man of science and he used science to explain everything, which is why he only had men of science present at the dinner. Some were of science: the Medical Man and the Psychologist. Some were ignorant of science: the Provincial Mayor. The ones that were hostile towards it: Filby, the Editor, and the Journalist. Yet there were two other figures that were odd balls at the table: the Very Young Man and the Silent Man. The Very Young Man was the one that wanted use the Time Machine to go back in time and learn from people of influence, although the Time Traveller wanted nothing, it seemed, to do with the past. Yet, there is only a single mention of the Silent Man and that is to tell the reader that he didn’t say anything during or after the story. What is the purpose of these two men? Do they represent a character further on in the story or are they the people who do not make it into the future?

Click here for a list of Wells’ works:
http://www.iblist.com/author165.htm

The Plot

The narrative is given through the perspective of an unnamed character (possibly Hillyer) and begins in the home of the Time Traveller, a scientist and inventor in Victorian England. During a dinner meeting with the narrator, Filby, Medicine Man, Psychologist, and the Mayor, the Time Traveller lectures on the theories of the three spatial dimensions, and concludes that there is a fourth dimension, which is not special, but temporal.

The Time Traveller transitions from discussions of dimension to the possibilities of time travel, and unveils a tabletop prototype time machine to his skeptical dinner guests. The machine vanishes after activation, and the Time Traveller shows his bewildered guests the larger machine he will be using to travel through time the next day.

One week later, at a similar dinner party, the Time Traveller stumbles in late, injured and covered with dust, and excuses himself to clean up and change before giving any explanation as to his whereabouts and condition. At this point the narration switches from the unnamed guest to the Time Traveller as he recounts his experience testing his machine.

The Time Traveller visits 802,701 A.D. where he comes into contact with that he considers the declining state of mankind and civilization. He meets the Eloi, a small, child-like race living above ground in large, crumbling palaces. Remnants of an aristocratic leisure class, the Time Traveller notes that they have since fallen into decline, not knowing how to work or use their time productively. He theorizes that the communal Eloi are the products of a sort of Utopian communistic society where nature has been dominated by man and all basic needs have been met, resulting in no danger, risk, or need to work.
The Time Traveller befriends a female Eloi, Weena, after saving her from drowning. She becomes attached to him, following him wherever he goes and providing further insight into the Eloi. He notices that Weena and other Eloi are afraid of the dark, and avoid large structures, vent shafts, going underground, scattered about the landscape.

Discovering that the Time Machine is missing, the Time Traveller initially suspects it was stolen by the Eloi, but later finds that it has been locked inside a nearby structure resembling a Sphinx by the Morlocks, a subterranean dwelling race of ape-like who come to the surface at night, while the Eloi are asleep. The Time Traveller expands on his previous theory that the Eoli, the leisure class, are supported by the Morlocks, who live underground working with machinery to create the goods and lifestyle enjoyed by the Eloi. Upon venturing into the underground tunnels of the Morlocks, the Time Traveller discovers that they are carnivorous and feed upon the Eloi for sustenance, as other major fauna have since become extinct. He further concludes that at one point in time the Eloi were the aristocratic ruling class and the Morlocks the workers, but over time, as meat became scarcer, the Morlocks began to feed on the Eloi, keeping them alive above ground for food, essentially as livestock.

The Time Traveller and Weena set out towards a large green structure in hopes of finding a location that can be fortified against the Worlocks, and discover it to be the ruins of a museum. He finds a box of matches and an iron bar which he plans to use to defend himself against the Morlocks. Discovering that parts of the museum are accessible underground, and finding fresh Morlock prints inside, he decides to venture back with Weena, and on the journey back, the Time Traveller and Weena spend the night camping in the forest, building a fire to keep the Morlocks away as the Morlocks are both blinded and afraid of light.

The Morlocks wait until the fire burns out and overpower Weena and the Time Traveller, who defends himself with his crowbar before setting a small fire and escaping without Weena, whom he supposes was taken by the Morlocks. The fire spreads into a massive forest fire, killing many of the Morlocks, and, he supposes, Weena. The Time Traveller returns to the Sphynx, finding it open. He goes inside, finding the Time Machine oiled and cleaned, and realizes that he has been trapped by the Morlocks, who close the door and attempt to overpower him. He manages to activate the Time Machine and travels approximately thirty million years into the future to a dying Earth, populated by large crab-like creatures and giant moths, and slowly jumps forward in time to observe the death of life on the planet.

The Time Traveller then returns back to his original time, several hours after he started, where his dinner guests are waiting. The guests refuse to believe his story, yet the presence of two flowers given to him by Weena, unknown in the Time Traveller’s time, cannot be account for. The Narrator visits the Time Traveller the next day and observes him in his machine with a camera. The Time Traveller fails to return after three years, despite saying that he would return in a half hour, leaving the Narrator to speculate on what might have happened to him either in the past or the future.

**Topics for Discussion**

**Class**
Class plays an important role in *The Time Machine*. The society depicted that exists in the future aptly reflects upon the strict dichotomy that existed between the more privileged upper class, and the tough lives of the working class. This story gives insight into a more extreme example of this divide in class and society. In Wells' England, the Industrial Revolution has shifted the British class system into the working, industrial class, and the aristocratic leisure class. For the upper class, we see the Eloi, which are physically weak and frail beings that exist in a lavish society and spend much of their time partaking in indulgences. The Eloi represent the leisure class, who benefit from the working class by consuming goods, yet do not have or need employment themselves. The lower class is represented by the Morlocks, which are more ape-like in appearance. The fact that they are more physically powerful is a testament to them being the harder workers, which in itself is a nod at the very real social classes that existed in Victorian times. What separates Wells' depiction of societal class than the actual cases of it is the idea of power. Pertaining to the British rules, especially in colonialism, there is an obvious display of strength within the upper class and colonizers. However, in *The Time Machine*, it is revealed that the Eloi are more or less bred for the purpose of consumption. This puts power into the hands of the seemingly inferior society that lives in the sub terrain. This begs the question, who are the ones that ultimately hold power within societies with such stark distinctions between two classes? Are these societal classes cases where both classes depend on one another for survival?

**Darwinism**

In *The Time Machine*, the idea of evolution is presented by the two societies that exist in the future: The Eloi and the Morlock. The Eloi are physically weak and are strictly vegetarian. They live carefree, peaceful lives, which ultimately leads to their ignorance. There is a clear devolution within these seemingly 'upper class' beings. This suggests that a consistently lavish existence with nothing to work for ultimately leads to regression both intellectually and physically. On the other hand, the Morlocks are the beastly creatures that have evolved not only in regards to strength, but are slightly more intellectually aware than the Eloi. They have crafted a perfect world for their food, giving them a false sense of security. This level of savagery mixed is a very basic portrayal of survival in an animalistic sense, which can be compared to troglodytes. Evolution is, once again, the extreme results of these habits. This is a very clear example of ignorance taking over those that slowly begin to forsake the need to use intellect or put effort into anything. On the other hand, this is also an example of the working class, the industrial lower level retaining the efforts it has to make, which ultimately is exemplified by the Morlock. What is curious to note is that advanced intellect is absent from both societies, which suggests a devolution in regards to humanity. This is a case of ranchers and cattle, or even more simply, predator and prey. This suggests that ultimately, basic instincts and objective means of survival are what prevail in the end when the time of higher intelligence rises and falls.

**Uncertainty Over the Future of Man/Arrogance**
In *The Time Machine*, the idea of human intellect as part of a Victorian society brings with it connotations of arrogance. This arrogance is seen from the very beginning of the book where the Time Traveller fully believes that he will be of primitive intellect in comparison to the humans of the future. He views intelligence as a consistent progression that evolves to become greater, and it reflects a very human central ideology. It is curious to note that the focus is on humanity's progression instead of the environments surrounding it. This idea of arrogance once again emerges at the very end of the book when the narrator discounts the Time Traveller's entire recollection about his travels.

"But to me, the future is still black and blank—is vast ignorance lit at a few casual places by the memory of his story." (148)

The Narrator continues to steadfastly believe that his future is uncertain, refusing to accept the fact that human intelligence can eventually devolve and lead to a social regression. This further implies the arrogance that is associated with intelligence, but also shows a desire to embrace the uncertainty of the future of humanity instead of accepting the prospect of lesser intelligence.

**Art and the Masses**

Wells believed that art, and especially fiction, should be used as a catalyst for social reform and education.

**A Matter of Form**

The Early Frame and Science Fiction

H.G. Wells focuses invariably on what matters most to him in a story: the story itself. That is, Wells is concerned with the effect of a story on the reader. He is an eminent progenitor of science fiction, but his work makes clear that the human element — the Time Traveller as opposed to the Time Machine, the narrator's reaction to portended doom, the closing moments of hope — is the driving force that reinvents science as literature. On this, Wells does not equivocate:

"In all this type of story the living interest lies in their non-fantastic elements and not in the invention itself. They are appeals for human sympathy quite as much as any 'sympathetic' novel, and the fantastic element, the strange property or the strange world, is used only to throw up and intensify our natural reactions of wonder, fear or perplexity." (Wells 154)

What natural reaction, however, does Wells seek to evoke? And how does science fiction spark this particular reaction? Clearly he intends to produce an emotional response, but *The Time Machine* begins in a vastly different atmosphere from that in which it ends. It begins by immediately placing the reader in the action, though the action seems as dull as a fireside chat. It is crucial to note, however, that Wells uses unnamed or abstractly named characters because these "gaps" in the content are intended to be filled by the reader. When the Time Traveller speaks, he speaks on the page to "the Psychologist" (Well 5) or "the Provincial Mayor" (Wells 6), yet the form of direct address to "you," an audience — from an expert in the field to those who understand nothing of that field — is meant precisely to ignite wonder in the reader.

"You must follow me carefully. I shall have to controvert one or two ideas that are almost universally accepted... I do not mean to ask you to accept anything without reasonable ground for it. You will soon admit as much as I need from you. You know of course that a mathematical line, a line of thickness nil, has no real existence. They taught you that? Neither has a mathematical plane. These things are mere abstractions."

"That is all right," said the Psychologist.

"Nor, having only length, breadth, and thickness, can a cube have a real existence."

"There I object," said Filby. "Of course a solid body may exist. All real things — "

"So most people think. But wait a moment. Can an instantaneous cube exist?"

"Don't follow you," said Filby.

"Can a cube that does not last for any time at all, have a real existence?" (Wells 5)
If H.G. Wells is not the first to question the notion of time and existence, he is one of the first to put the question into a story that illuminates the possibility of an answer. In a broad way, The Time Machine fulfills and shapes the form of science fiction, of the fantastic, as a means of posing possible answers and giving meaning to those answers. The beginning of the novel begs the question to which the Time Traveller has the answer, and without the "living interest" of the fiction this question could as easily be challenged in an essay. Wells’ choice of form is deliberate. The Time Traveller goes on to demonstrate that he can indeed travel through the fourth dimension, but rather than develop the intricacies of time travel, Wells focuses on the dire possibilities the Time Traveller has introduced.

A Further Gap: The Time Traveller as a Void

I think that at that time none of us quite believed in the Time Machine. The fact is, the Time Traveller was one of those men who are too clever to be believed: you never felt that you saw all round him; you always suspected some subtle reserve, some ingenuity in ambush, behind his lucid frankness. Had Filby shown the model and explained the matter in the Time Traveller's words, we should have shown him far less scepticism. For we should have perceived his motives: a pork butcher could understand Filby. But the Time Traveller had more than a touch of whim among his elements, and we distrusted him. Things that would have made the fame of a less clever man seemed tricks in his hands. It is a mistake to do things too easily. The serious people who took him seriously never felt quite sure of his deportment: they were somehow aware that trusting their reputations for judgment with him was like furnishing a nursery with eggshell china. (Wells 12)

This passage exemplifies — perhaps more than any other in the novel — the notion that form not only frames content, but introduces its own. The narrator supplies information that, though ostensibly a brief description of the Time Traveller’s character, in fact reveals the central aspect of the novel: when the narrator divulges that the Time Traveller “had more than a touch of whim among his elements” and that no one could perceive the Time Traveller’s motives, he reveals that the Time Traveller is not meant to be understood. While not relegated completely to the status of a symbol, the Time Traveller nevertheless becomes a representation of an idea, though the nihilistic character he embodies does not emerge until the epilogue. Impossibly intelligent, mysterious, and possessing indecipherable motives, the Time Traveller is what Wells calls the “impossible hypothesis” (Wells 154). That is, he is part of the fantastic element of the work, his inner workings as mysterious as the components of the Time Machine. This passage establishes the frame narrator as the grounding, non-fantastic element — his narrative will later act in contraposition with the Time Traveller, for while the latter reveals facts, the former reveals what those facts mean for humanity. But if Wells were searching for this aspect of humanity, why make the main character of a work impenetrable?

Wells does not provide the reader with a character to emulate or adore because the work, as a whole, is not intended to demonstrate character. Rather, the reader’s focus should have wider scope. What is most important in the novel (structurally) is the interplay between frame and framed. There are essentially two main characters in The Time Machine, though the reader hears much of one voice and almost nothing of the other. The Time Traveller, despite occupying the majority of the work, illuminates little of himself that resonates with the reader. Much as the eight hundred thousand years of the future are too distant to connect to the present, the Time Traveller himself is too intelligent, too unreadable. The frame narrator cannot provide the hidden dimension — his purpose is to connect to the reader in the way that the Time Traveller cannot. The narrator interprets the framed narrative and responds with the very humanity so lacking in the Time Traveller. His lack of complete understanding (he has not seen the future with his own eyes) mirrors the ignorance of the reader. Yet the narrator is not meant to understand; he is meant to express his emotion. In this way, The Time Machine strives for a new “natural reaction” that has the power to resonate.

Epilogue: “Into the Manhood of the Race . . .”
One cannot choose but wonder. Will he ever return? It may be that he swept back into the past, and fell among the blood — drinking, hairy savages of the Age of Unpolished Stone; into the abysses of the Cretaceous Sea; or among the grotesque saurians, the huge reptilian brutes of the Jurassic times. He may even now — if I may use the phrase — be wandering on some pleiosaurus — haunted Oolitic coral reef, or beside the lonely saline seas of the Triassic Age. Or did he go forward, into one of the nearer ages, in which men are still men, but with the riddles of our own time answered and its wearisome problems solved? Into the manhood of the race: for I, for my own part, cannot think that these latter days of weak experiment, fragmentary theory, and mutual discord are indeed man's culminating time! I say, for my own part. He, I know — for the question had been discussed among us long before the Time Machine was made — thought but cheerlessly of the Advancement of Mankind, and saw in the growing pile of civilization only a foolish heaping that must inevitably fall back upon and destroy its makers in the end. If that is so, it remains for us to live as though it were not so. But to me the future is still black and blank — is a vast ignorance, lit at a few casual places by the memory of his story. And I have by me, for my comfort, two strange white flowers — shrivelled now, and brown and flat and brittle — to witness that even when mind and strength had gone, gratitude and a mutual tenderness still lived on in the heart of man. (Wells 71)

The epilogue leaves the reader with something far more than a bleak, barren vision of the future. Indeed, it uses the power of the dark view of the Time Traveller’s narrative to fuel its own purpose: closing with a sense of the human element. Acting despite the sure knowledge of the end of mankind, the narrator ends on a note of “gratitude and a mutual tenderness” — the frame counters the framed. Earlier the narrator intimates the unreadable motivations of the Time Traveller; here, he reveals that the seemingly impenetrable man “saw in the growing pile of civilization only a foolish heaping . . . .” The dichotomy between the two characters is ever more prevalent, and the purpose emphatically clear. The narrator’s optimism rebuffs the Time Traveller’s nihilism. The Time Traveller never believed in humanity, his own theory proven when he travels into the future. But his reasons for his beliefs and his current thoughts are mysteries. He remains indecipherable. The narrator is the only opportunity for insight; the form — the frame — provides a way to interpret the Time Traveller’s story: a dark warning, but also a sense of purpose against what the Time Traveller views as futility.

The epilogue is steeped in ignorance and possibility. The Time Traveller is gone and the narrator is left with the worn remnants of an unbelievable story with an unbearable ending. What comes next even Wells does not know, for the possibilities are deliberately inexhaustible. Yet the story’s crucial aspect remains intact: the “living interest” (Wells 154) that is the dynamic relationship between frame and framed. The form of The Time Machine communicates more than the characters and dialogue. The possibilities of interpretation, however, are limitless. Perhaps the predicted doom can change? Or, in a darker world, perhaps the Time Traveller is right to believe in futility: perhaps the narrator — out of denial, out of fear, out of his “appeals for human sympathy” (Wells 154) — views humanity’s extinction as the unthinkable, “impossible hypothesis” (Wells 155).
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