

H.G. WELLS
and
The Time Machine

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Herbert George Wells was born on Sept. 21st 1866 at Bromley, Kent and died in London, August 13.1946.

His father Joseph Wells, kept a small hardware shop and was an enthusiastic professional cricketer. His mother, whose maiden name was Neal, had been in domestic services at nearby state of Uppark (Bladesover in Tono Bungay). The family's income was scarce, barely sufficient to keep them above the poverty line.

From his father young Herbert George (Bertie as he was called) had inherited a taste for reading which he was able to indulge freely at the local literary institute and lending library. He was sent to an establishment called Morley's Academy- after he had attended to a local cottage school, but his real education came from omnivarious reading, a habit formed in 1874 while he was laid up for some months with a broken leg.

Between 1880 and 1883 Wells spent most of his time as a draper's apprentice in Windsor and Southsea, a way of life for which he later recorded his profound detestation in Kipps.

After a year as a teacher assistant at Midhurst Grammar School, and in 1884, he won a scholarship to the normal School of Science in South Kensington. There he made a promising start as a student under professor Thomas Henry Huxley. His interest was faltered in the following year, and he left to work in private schools, not taking his B.Sc. until 1890. However he studied there physics, chemistry, geology, astronomy and biology- the latter under T.H.Huxley. He took his degree with first class honours in zoology and second class honours in geology. In the year 1891, he became a biology tutor in the university of Correspondence College and continued to work there until 1893. He was married to his cousin Isabel and became the author of a remarkable article called "The Rediscovery of the Unique", in the *Fortnightly Review*. After much writing on educational subjects, essays, reviews and various short stories in periodicles and magazines, he began his sensational career with *The Time Machine* 1895, a science fiction novel.

Meanwhile Wells had given up teaching and had left Isabel for one of his brightest students, Amy Catherine (Jane) Robins whom he married in 1895. He had two sons from his second marriage. There followed a series of scientific romances most notably; *The Island of Dr. Moreau* 1896, *The Invisible Man* 1897, *The War of the Worlds* 1898, *The First Man on the Moon* 1901, *The War in the Air* 1908.

In 1900 Wells moved to novel proper with *Love and Mr. Lewisham*, a story of his student days at South Kensington. He then wrote other sociological novels such as *Kipps* 1905, *Tono Bungay* 1909, *The History of Mr. Polly* 1909 and *Ann Veronica* 1909. His literary reputation probably depends on these. These novels are true novels containing "a spirit of profound hostility to the Victorian social order and to the body of orthodox opinion which supported it" (I)

Wells appears as a prophet with *Anticipations* 1901, *Mankind in the making* 1903, *A Modern Utopia* 1905. He thereby came to know G. Bernard Shaw who claimed that he and Wells between them had "changed the mind of Europe" (2). The other leaders of the Fabian Society joined this organization in 1903. Wells tried in 1907 to turn a large scale operation against Shaw, but he was defeated by the 'Old Gang' under Shaw's leadership and he resigned from the society in 1908. After this experience, he wrote his last novel of literary importance *The New Machiavelli* 1901 into which he introduced brilliant portraits from noted Fabians.

After 1898, Henry James, seeing in him a most gifted talent of the age, tried to make him a disciplined artist of fiction. For a time Wells did want to learn the lesson of the master, but after *The New Machiavelli*, he turned freely to "dialogue novel" which enabled him to express his current interests.

In 1915 a parody called *Boon* and in 1916, *Mr. Britling Sees it Through* were published. These novels made him not only very famous in England but as well in the United States.

Wells' last books, *Experiment in Autobiography* appeared in 1934, *The Shape of Things to Come* in 1933. This one was widely influential which did much to awaken audience to the dangers threatening the West. In 1938 *Apropas Dolores* appeared which was a largely entertaining book.

Through World War II, Wells lived in his house on Regent's Park. In 1945 his last book *Mind at the End of its Thether* appeared. In this work he expressed his pessimism about mankind's future.

In 1942 in *English Novelists*, Elizabeth Boven ranks Wells with Samuel Butler for their scientific approach to life and like Hardy, Wells had a constant sense of the future (3) In his attempt to write the sociological novel Wells was also accompanied by Arnold Bennett with *The Old Wives's Tales* (1908).

In 1953, in *The Modern Writer and His World*, Fraser indicated that "Wells was a natural artist, but when he tried to think seriously about the novel, he thought of it mainly as a vehicle for popularizing his ideas" (4). In *Experiment in Autobiography*, Wells described a conversation in which James reproached him for his lack of artistic conscience in a novel called *Marriage*. This novel has been seen as the "novel of ideas" in which it was more important for Wells to discuss ideas than tell a story. In fact the hero and the heroine disappear at one point into a country lane and emerge again three hours later, engaged. Wells gave no hint of what they were saying or doing after they had disappeared. According to the strict rules of novel writing, H. James would have considered this cheating. Wells could not understand this, for him conveying ideas are more important or above artistic rules, whereas James would think just the opposite of Wells, having a high idea of the novel as an art form.

In his book *The English Novel* (1954), Walter Allen thinks highly of Wells and sees him to be a greater genius than any other novelist of his time in England and for him as well Wells' scientific romances are unsurpassed.

In 1961 in "The Comedy of Ideas: Cross-Currents in the Fiction and Drama of the twentieth Century", it has been noted by R.C. Churchill, that Wells wrote to James the following on literature:

"To you literature like painting is an end,
to me literature like architecture is a means,
it has a use... I had rather be called a
Journalist than an artist, that is the essence of it" (5).

Here we see that Wells opposes James' view of literature and 'art for art's sake' opinion and defends his view that he, as a writer would even prefer to be called a journalist than an artist. For Wells literature has a use and it is a means of conveying ideas, reflecting life and prophesies and so on. Wells satirizes the literary artist of James' type in *Boon* (1915) as he satirized the sociologist of the type of Webbs in *The New Machiavelli* (1911)

In Wells and James controversy on art and literature, G.B. Shaw would have probably echoed Wells's remarks. Shaw as we know, have been already connected with Wells, in their famous Socialist and Evolutionist debates. However they are very different. While Wells was a teacher of science and a writer of scientific text books before he became a novelist, G.B. Shaw was a music critic and one of the best in modern times before he became a famous playwright. It is clear that Wells and Shaw were interested in different fields of knowledge before they became involved in different types of literature. However a similarity has been observed between Wells and Shaw in that, that both writer had a Dickensian gift of comic speech, if Wells' characters are not often remembered as persons, they

are more often recalled as mouthpieces of the author; their characteristic idiom may be remembered.

Lionel Stevenson, in *The History of the English Novel* (first published in 1967) brackets H.G. Wells with Kipling, Conan Doyle, and Jules Verne (6). First, Wells emerged from the lowest levels of the middle class, which had produced few English novelists, such as Dickens and D.H. Lawrence. Wells' father like Dickens' was seldom to earn a minimal living for his family; Wells' mother, like Dickens' grandmother, was in the upper level of domestic service. Like Dickens too, Wells was obliged to go to work at an early age in tedious and humiliating employment. For both youths, early experienced poverty and social inferiority induced a determination to rise in social life and to earn rapid money and popularity since they already had the gift for success. Wells was half a century younger than Dickens. Therefore the road to a successful career did not pass from daily journalism, as it was in the days of Dickens, but from scientific research in the 1880 s. Dickens was once an admirable reporter but Wells became an admirable laboratory technician. Only through winning scholarships, it was possible for Wells to arise from the once despised statute and the low standart of living to a popular career and a respectable position. He bought several houses and probably attained the desired richness after so many years of hardship and poverty. His fiction novels and stories may still continue to drive interest from the readers.

The Time Machine

(1895)

The first chapter opens with the Time Traveller and some men of science discussing the dimensions. The Time Traveller insists that "there are really four dimensions, three of which we call three planes of Space, and a fourth, Time". The writer denotes the plausibility that if Time is regarded as only a fourth dimension of Space, then it can be possible to move about in Time as we move about in other dimensions of Space. Thus the Time Traveller explains to the scientists that he had made a Time Machine to be able to move in Time to whenever he wished as he explained in the following lines:

"We are always getting away from the present moment. Our mental existences, which are immaterial and have no dimensions, are passing along the Time-Dimension with a uniform velocity from the cradle to the grave" (7)

"That is the germ of my discovery", says the Time Traveller and adds, "you are wrong to say we cannot move about in Time". The psychologist seemed convinced and said:

"It would be remarkably convenient for the the historian, ... One might travel back and verify the accepted account of the Battle of Hastings, for instance!"(8)

and the other added:

"One might get one's Greek from the very lips of Homer and Plato" and then "one might invest all one's money, leave it to accumulate at interest, and hurry on ahead!"

Thus the reality of a time machine is made acceptable and desirable at first before the reader is actually introduced to it. The Time Traveller brings in the thing, the machine in his hand, it is a glittering metallic framework, scarcely larger than a small clock, and very delicately made. There was ivory and some transparent crystalline substance in it and it looked rather unreal in its twinkling appearance. As they experimented with it, they saw it vanished. The medical man was still doubting:

"Look here, are you earnest about this?

Do you seriously believe that the machine has travelled into time?"

'Certainly', said the Time Traveller.

'What is more, I have a big machine nearly finished in there'-he indicated the laboratory-

'and when that is put together I mean to have a journey on my own account.'(9)

The provincial mayor and the other scientists together with the 'I' person who relates the tale, continue their arguments on the machine and dimensions until the end of the first chapter. The Time Traveller taking them to the machine tells:-

'Upon that machine, ... I intend to explore time. Is that plain? I was never serious in my life.'

As the Time Traveller intends to actualize his wish, the writer aims at taking the readers along with him, to travel into the imaginary future of the world and to show us how the future develops and what awaits the world in far future in his opinion. It seems that one is carried into a fantasy world, a dream world which appears quite actual.

At the beginning of chapter II, the writer begins to build up a suspense around the Time Traveller revealing that he is too clever a man and says, 'you always suspected some subtle reserve; that is there is always something which he hides. The motives of an ordinary man such as Filby would be clearly understood, but the Time Traveller was different- his motives could not be understood clearly. It

was clear that he desired to travel into the future, but there was something more than just a desire or a wish about him. One would certainly suspect such a person. The medical man still thought that it must be a trick, but he could not explain how the trick was done. The writer (I person) revealed that the doubts about the Time Traveller did not cease.

One day as the doctor, the psychologist, the journalist and a few others were sitting and waiting for the Time Traveller to come, suddenly he appears at the doorway in an amazing condition as described by the writer:

"His coat was dusty and dirty, and smeared with green down the sleeves; his hair disordered, and as it seemed to me greyer either with dust and dirt or because its colour had actually faded. His face was ghastly pale; his chin had a brown cut on it—a cut half healed; his expression haggard and drawn, as by intense suffering." (10).

The writer was sure that the Traveller travelled through time, the psychologist agreed with him this time, but the others still doubted. It was clear that what he experienced was not at all something brilliant or even good, but something ghastly and exhausting. One felt the hint that the future of the world must be a deadly one. The writer noticed that the Traveller was lame and went upstairs painfully with blood-stained stockings, he had no shoes on. The Time Traveller was hungry and ate hastily, he became 'the silent man'. His silence was prophetic of something very unpleasant coming. He began to tell his story to the guests. The listeners of the Time Traveller were fictional guests who were about to hear an interesting prophesy about the future of the world. The writer seems to hint that the readers could also hear an interesting story about the future if they wait and see.

Switching the Time Machine to the year Eight Hundred and Two Thousand, the Time Traveller met at first a white marble sphinx which 'imparted an unpleasant suggestion of disease'. Then some graceful, gentle, childlike, rather frail looking people of small height surrounded him. The Traveller felt himself very strong in comparison and thought that he would fling the whole dozen of them like pins. The Traveller perceived a certain lack of interest as they made no effort to communicate with him. He had always expected that in the far future the people would be incredibly in front of the present civilization in knowledge, art, and in everything, but to his surprise they asked him a question that showed them to be in the intellectual level of a five-year-old child. The Time Traveller commented in the following way:

” A flow of disappointment rushed across my mind. For a moment I felt that I had built the Time Machine in vain.” (II)

The disappointment in the Time Traveller’s comment on the future of mankind expresses a distrust and a sceptical point of view on the scientific development of human generation as a whole. The spontaneous human generation has lost its vitality and has become less than human. These people who were called Eloi were strict vegetarians. Horses, cattle, sheep and dogs did not exist anymore. They ate delightful fruits and they were easily tired and lazy people. They were so much like infants that the Time Traveller felt himself like a master amidst them. He perceived that all had the same costume, the same hairless face and a girlish roundness of the limbs. The people of the future were sexless; they were all alike. It seemed that they were miniatures. The final comment of the Time Traveller at this scene was only communism’ and further on, his comment reflects the writer’s own thoughts on population and security as expressed in the following lines;

”Seeing the ease and security in which these people were living, I felt that this close resemblance of the sexes was after all what one would expect; for the strength of a man and the softness of a woman, the institution of the family, and the differentiation of occupations are mere militant necessities of an age of physical force. Where population is balanced and abundant, much child-bearing becomes an evil rather than a blessing to the State;- indeed there is no necessity for an efficient family, and the specialization, of the sexes with reference to their children’s needs disappears. We see some beginnings of this even in our own time, and in this future age it was complete. This, I must remind you, was my speculation at the time. Later I was to appreciate how far it fell short of the reality..” (12)

From the very first sentence one may draw out the conclusion that ‘security’ and ‘ease’ may be the cause of resemblances between the sexes and of the decreasing in muscular human strength and cerebral power. In an age of human power it is necessary to have the institution of family and to develop specialized occupations or jobs. If the population is abundant then much child bearing is evil. According to the Traveller, there would be no necessity for an efficient family and the specialization of the sexes according to the needs of the children. The

beginnings of such a process was also seen at the present time and in future it was completed, but The Traveller adds in the last sentence that his speculation was not altogether the right explanation of the things as he had seen. However in the following pages he goes on to defend and to complete his speculations on humanity and on nature. In the lines below we see the development of his previous thoughts. He says:

”Strenght is the outcome of need; security sets premium on feebleness. The work of ameliorating the conditions of life- the true civilizing process that makes life more and more secure- had gone steadily on to a climax. One triumph of a united humanity over Nature had followed another. Things that are now mere dreams had become projects deliberately put in hand and carried forward. And the harvest was what I saw!” (13).

The main idea in this extract is that civilization is a process which makes life more and more secure and security may be the cause of feebleness and not of power. Strenght or power is the result of need but as we understand civilization has no need for power. It is the united aim of humanity to triumph over nature in order to attain the desired security. Here one may well feel that The Traveller is well against the conquest of nature and thinks that civilization destroys human intelligence and power of the muscles. The harvest which he had seen is a very unpleasant one. The reader may instantly ask the question-what would the real human kind see in his future harvest? Can this be actualized? Or can the dream of H.G. Wells come true? It is still hard to give a definite answer.

The Traveller continues his comments on sanitation, agriculture, horticulture and family life. An answer is being given to the question, ”how would man triumph over nature?” These are the answers as follows:

”The science of our time has attacked but a little department of the field of human disease, but, even so, it spreads its operations very steadily and persistently. Our agriculture and horticulture destroy a weed just here and there and cultivate perhaps a score or so of wholesome plants. leaving the greater number to fight out a balance as they can. We improve our favorite plants and animals- and how few they are- gradually by selective breeding; now a new and a better peach, now a seedless grape, now a sweeter and a larger flower, now a more convenient breed of catle. We improve them gradually, because our ideals are vague and

tentative, and our knowledge is very limited; because Nature, too is shy and slow in our clumsy hands. Some day all this will be better organized, and still better. ...The whole world will be intelligent, educated, and co-operating; things will move faster and faster towards the subjugation of Nature. (14)

As The Traveller indicates, the science of his time is developing fast but it has not conquered much in the field of human diseases. Agriculture and horticulture do all to improve favorite human plants, weeds and even animals, but human knowledge is very limited. That is it is not to be trusted. Some day mankind, better and better equipped by science, will move faster and faster to the suppression of Nature. Here The Traveller is expressing an open distrust in the scientific developments. As there is no view developed against this opinion in the novel we may well draw out that this is the writer's point of view.

In the future of the world, ironically enough most of the problems were solved; people were not engaged in hard toil. There was no struggle, neither social nor economical. There was no traffic, commerce or advertisement. The difficulty of over-population was met. The traveller guessed that population probably decreased. The population was chequed in the future world by one population eating the other. The Morlocks, creatures of the underworld kidnapped and ate the childlike Eloi of the over world. The writer seems to say that if humanity insisted on conquering the nature, the disturbance of balance in life may end in other kinds of horrors.

"What, unless biological science is a mass of errors, is the cause of human intelligence and vigours?", says The Time Traveller.

"Hardship and freedom: conditions under which the active, strong, and subtle survive and the weaker go to the wall; conditions that put a premium upon the loyal alliance of capable men, upon self restraint, patience, and decision. And the institution of the family, and the emotions that arise there in, the fierce jealousy, the tenderness for offspring, parental self-devotion, all found their justification and support in the imminent dangers of the young. Now where are these imminent dangers? There is a sentiment arising, and it will grow against connubial jealousy, against fierce maternity, against passion of all sorts; unnecessary things now, and things that make us uncomfortable, savage survivals, discords in a refined and pleasant life.

I thought of the physical slightness of the people, their lack of intelligence, and those big abundant ruins, and it strengthened my belief in a perfect conquest of Nature... Humanity had been strong, energetic, and intelligent, and had used all its abundant vitality to alter the conditions under which it lived. And now came the reaction of the altered conditions." (15).

From this text we may understand that in the past and in the present time when the traveller is living, hardship and freedom are the desired conditions under which active, strong, capable, patient and industrious men can survive. The institution of the family, the strong emotions such as jealousy, tenderness and devotions of the family members tend to be considered as undesired things for a pleasant and secure life. The same subject has been critically and ironically analyzed in Aldous Huxley's dystopia, *Brave New World* much later on in 1932.

The Traveller asks, where are these imminent dangers? Here there is the hint that for the strong emotions the dangers of life are needed. Where there are no dangers as in the future place to where The Time Traveller journeyed, there were no families and no strong emotions and no strong and able and active men. He adds that physical weakness strengthened his belief in a perfect conquest of 'Nature'. Humanity had been once energetic and strong but it altered the conditions of living and now came a reaction of the altered conditions. Here we may feel that there is an expression of fear in the face of the human evolution, the changes in life made by the uses of scientific developments. There is the fear that humanity is losing its vitality, emotions and most important of all its intelligence. It seems to be an unnecessary fear, perhaps resulting from distrust in humankind in the long run. Yet it may also be interpreted as a distressing prophesy believing not in the continuation of life but in death, not only in the death of human kind but also in the death of the world as a planet. Man's vain attempt of the perfect conquest of 'Nature' is going to end in final death. This seems to be the main theme of the novel as a whole.

The Traveller sees a danger for the strong under the new conditions of perfect comfort and security. It seems that comfort and security are not the good things but they are the evils of society. The Traveller continues to comment on this in the following manner:

"Under the new conditions of perfect comfort and security, that restless energy, that with us is strength, would become weakness... And in a state of physical balance and security, power, intellectual as physical would be out of place. For countless years I judged there had been no danger of war or solitary violence,

no danger from wild beasts, no wasting disease to require strength of constitution, no need of toil. For such a life, what we should call the weak are as well equipped as the strong, are indeed no longer weak. Better equipped indeed they are, for the strong would be fretted by an energy for which there was no outlet. ...This has ever been the fate of energy in security; it takes to art and to eroticism, and then come languor and decay. 'Even this artistic impetus would at last die away- had almost died in the Time I saw,' (16).

The Time Traveller goes to a time when there may be a state of balance, security and no wars. This is the general human wish, or has been always a desire from the very early times that human being was created. Yet ironically, all the attempts at creating a stable society does not work for the good of men but for his extinction from the face of the world. The weak seem to be better equipped for a life that needs no strength for diseases, wars and hard toil. As the energy of mankind is given no outlet it will surely spend its owner and the strong may probably vanish from the earth. According to The Time Traveller the end of power in security is death. We may see a similar approach in Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* where people are created according to the needs of the society in laboratories. There energy finds some outlets by the means of sports and eroticism.

In *Brave New World Revisited*, we see that some of the ideas which have been expressed previously by H.G. Wells in *The Time Machine*, have been developed much later on by Aldous Huxley. He comments on the development of science for the benefit of the weak as follows:

"...we are not only over-populating our planet, we are also, it would seem, making sure that these greater numbers shall be of biologically poorer quality... Today, thanks to sanitation, modern pharmacology and the social conscience, most of the children born with hereditary defects reach maturity and multiply their kind... In spite of the new wonder drugs and better treatment (indeed, in a certain sense, precisely because of these things), the physical health of the general population will show no improvement, and even deteriorate. And along with a decline of average healthiness there may well go a decline in average intelligence." (17)

This statement of Aldous Huxley shows scepticism on the advancement of better drugs and better conditions because it may cause a decline and a deteriora-

tion of average health and intelligence. The similarity between the sceptical views of A. Huxley and H.G. Wells, makes H.G. Wells' book of dysutopia even more important. In H.G. Wells' novel, the idea of decline and death of humankind after millions and millions of years persists as the main theme.

In his last voyage to the future, *The Time Traveller*, sees a completely desert-like dying world where huge crab-like creatures are toiling. They seem worse than the cannibal Morlocks and the childlike Eloi. The sky is no longer blue, the sea has lost its blue colour long ago. The sun has ceased to set, it only rose and fell from the west. There was no trace of the moon. More than 30 million years hence, there was death and decay in the whole landscape. The similar idea and fear that humanity is in decline towards death, is expressed not only by H.G. Wells but also by Aldous Huxley in *Brave New World*, and by E.M. Forster in his short story 'The Machine Stops'. According to these three writers there is not much hope in the Heavenly Paradise or in the belief of the great, triumph of men over 'Nature'. The final future is death but death in different ways according to the different writers.

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