

Commentary**Appreciation on Plots and Style of *The Time Machine*****Mengqi Song^{1,*}, Liping Chen²**¹School of Education, Nanjing Normal University, Nanjing, China²School of Foreign Languages and Cultures, Nanjing Normal University, Nanjing, China**Email address:**

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Abstract: *The Time Machine* is a science fiction novel by H. G. Wells. The author, Herbert George "H. G. Wells (21 September 1866 – 13 August 1946) was a prolific English writer in many genres, including the novel, history, politics, and social commentary, and textbooks and rules for war games. He is now best remembered for his science fiction novels, and is sometimes called the father of science fiction. This paper analyzes the plots and characters in this novel, and appreciates its style and achievements.

Keywords: *The Time Machine*, Science Fiction, Appreciation

1. Introduction

The Time Machine is a science fiction novel by H. G. Wells, published in 1895. Generally speaking, this novel is quite attractive, for it tells us readers a very intense adventure into the futurity, which is longed by the whole human species for centuries [1]. Even now, the time traveling is still a hot theme and topic all over the world, widely adopted in many novels, films and television programs, such as the film *Interstellar* directed by Christopher Nolan, in which the pilot father, Coop, traveled between galaxies, stars, and also through time to find a more agreeable planet for human to survive, and *Harry Potter* by Rowling. J.K in which Hermione got a sandglass necklace as a gift from Pro. McGonagall which can enable her to attend more classes by travel through time. Human's common curiosity and insecurity passed from generations makes it a predestinate interest for almost every person, young or old, male or female [2].

The author, Herbert George "H. G." Wells (21 September 1866 – 13 August 1946) was a prolific English writer in many genres, including the novel, history, politics, and social commentary, and textbooks and rules for war games. He is now best remembered for his science fiction novels, and is

sometimes called the father of science fiction, as are Jules Verne and Hugo Gernsback [3]. His most notable science fiction works include *The War of the Worlds*, *The Time Machine*, *The Invisible Man*, and *The Island of Doctor Moreau*.

Wells is generally credited with the popularization of the concept of time travel by using a vehicle that allows an operator to travel purposefully and selectively. The term "time machine", coined by Wells, is now universally used to refer to such a vehicle [4]. To some extents, it has also indirectly inspired many more works of fiction in many media.

2. Main Character of *The Time Machine*

The book's protagonist is an English scientist and gentleman inventor living in Victorian England, and identified by the narrator simply as the Time Traveler.

At the very beginning, the Time Traveler discusses his theories and demonstrates his model time machine at his Thursday-night dinner party. However, the guests mostly don't believe the Time Traveler, even after he makes a model Time Machine disappear and then shows them the full-scale machine. And the following week he arrives a half hour late to his regular party, looking weary and injured. The guests

are astounded at his disheveled look, and he has an incredible story to tell about his time travel adventure.

3. Plots of *The Time Machine*

During the trip he traveled to the future, he saw some interesting things like his housekeeper rocketing across the room. Also, days and nights and four seasons both alternated at an astonishing speed, the temperature went a little bit higher and the sun got closer to the earth. Finally, he arrived in the year 802,701 to begin his eight-day adventure:

On the first day, The Time Traveler arrives in a storm and meets the Eloi, a society of small, elegant, childlike adults, wearing graceful garments. His first theory is that the Eloi have machines that do their work for them so they can sit around and be lazy. They live in small communities within large and futuristic yet slowly deteriorating buildings, doing no work and having a frugivorous diet. He explores the world a bit and finds some strange wells. At night, he loses the Time Machine and freaks out.

On the second, he calms down and eventually concludes that the Time Machine has been dragged by some unknown party into a nearby structure with heavy doors, locked from the inside, which resembles a Sphinx. Luckily, he had removed the machine's levers before leaving it. He tries to befriend the Eloi and explore their world, hoping to figure out how to get his Time Machine back.

On the third, in the early morning he sees some unfamiliar creatures. In the afternoon he saves an Eloi named Weena from drowning as none of the other Eloi take any notice of her plight, and they develop an innocently affectionate relationship over the course of several days.

On the fourth, while exploring a ruin and he discovers a Morlock and watches it escape down one of the strange wells. The Time Traveler's second theory is that the Morlocks are the helpful workers who take care of the Eloi. In this theory, the Eloi are descended from the upper class, the Morlocks are descended from the working class, and everyone is happy – although the Morlocks are disgusting.

On the fifth, to postpone having to go down the well, the Time Traveler does more exploring of the countryside. He sees the Palace of Green Porcelain and decides to go there the following day.

On the sixth, realizing that he's just putting off the inevitable, the Time Traveler goes down one of the wells. He discovers the creepy and carnivorous Morlocks. He escapes from them and faints. In the afternoon, he starts to think about how to protect himself. He decides to go to the Palace of Green Porcelain which he hopes might serve as a fortress against the Morlocks, but it turns out to be the remains of a museum, where he finds a fresh supply of matches and fashions a crude weapon against Morlocks, whom he fears and he must fight to get back his machine. At night, while Weena sleeps on a hill, the Time Traveler observes the stars. He comes to the realization that the Morlocks eat Eloi.

On the seventh, the Time Traveler explores the palace and finds some possible tools for self-defense: a club, some

matches, and camphor. They start to travel back to the White Sphinx. Later, night falls while they're in a forest. The Time Traveler starts a fire, which later gets out of control. The Morlocks attack, but the Time Traveler fights them off and sets another fire. Then he falls asleep. When he wakes up, his fire is out, the Morlocks are attacking again, and Weena is gone. The first forest fire is coming to get them. He runs and spends the night in a clearing, with the forest fire all around him.

On the eighth, the Time Traveler makes his way back to the White Sphinx, which is open. He gets his Time Machine and fights off the Morlocks long enough to escape.

Then, he goes forward in time. There he sees some of the last living things on a dying Earth, menacing reddish crab-like creatures slowly wandering the blood-red beaches chasing butterflies in a world covered in simple lichenous vegetation. He continues to make short jumps through time, seeing Earth's rotation gradually cease and the sun grow larger, redder, and dimmer, and the world where all life has vanished except for some creature that looks like a black rock jumping at a distance falling silent and freezing as the last degenerate living things die out. He goes back to his time and tells his dinner guests this story.

4. Comments on the Style and Achievements of *The Time Machine*

4.1. Theme and Style

No one believes the Time Traveler, except the narrator. The next day after the time traveler came back, he saw the narrator before venturing off again into time expecting he'll be back with proof and promises to return in half an hour. But according to the narrator, the time traveler never came back and it has been three years.

The story reflects Wells's own socialist political views, his view on life and abundance, and the contemporary angst about industrial relations. It conveys many themes, including time, science, society and class, and technology and modernization [5].

The Time Machine is so concerned with the theme of time that "time" is in the title. And the novel's other themes are all tied up with this theme. The time in *The Time Machine* doesn't mean the last week or the next year but time on a human scale. Time in *The Time Machine* is on a scale that's totally beyond anything human [6]. It is geological or even cosmic time. When the Time Traveler travels into the future, he doesn't watch the lifespan of a person, but the lifespan of a species—or even the lifespan of a star. Thinking about time in this way involves looking at the long view – even though that long view moves people out of the spotlight. In this novel, the Time Traveler says that memory is a form of time travel. It is sort of traveling through time when people are recalling the past. Time seems to flow backward and everything happens again. However, it is hard to explain when people forget some detail matters of the past incidence in the memory, and sometimes the memory may go wrong

when long period of time passed. In such circumstance, is the time line broken or changed? It's better to take the long view when thinking over the social issues [7]. Human reaches his peak and decline to a dangerous situation after over 800,000 years, while there're signs indicating this trend at present: the lazy people chasing after comfort, enjoyment and convenience, the upper class people excluding the underclass away from their extravagant life which can be typically shown in the super metropolis Dubai, poor people being hidden at the invisible lousy and nasty corners of the city, and people being divided automatically and developing in different directions. "Scientific people know very well that Time is only a kind of Space. [8]" This is the Time Traveler's central argument and the basis for his Time Machine. It's also an example of how readers have to re-think time and look at it from a scientific perspective. When the Time Traveler speaks about "time," he's not talking about the day-to-day version that people experience but about a scientific conception of time.

Science in *The Time Machine* isn't just about making machines that travel through time. Rather, science is about a way of thinking. People start with an observation, come up with a theory, test that theory, and repeat as necessary until they're reasonably sure they have the right answer. There's a lot of science in this book, since the protagonist is a scientist, dealing with scientific things in a scientific manner. Some interesting things come up when readers look closely at the science in the book. The most important being that science involves being wrong a lot. But that's all part of getting closer to the truth. Skepticism plays an important role in science, the problem should be analyzed in different views. Science makes us human. The Eloi is less scientific than the Morlocks. So the up world citizens are facing the danger of revenge from the underground residents who are kept working, thinking and maintain the spirit of exploring. "I was surprised to find it had been carefully oiled and cleaned. I have suspected since that the Morlocks had even partially taken it to pieces while trying in their dim way to grasp its purpose." Up until this point, the Time Traveler had assumed the Morlocks weren't much smarter than the Eloi. But the Morlocks tried to understand his machine. This makes readers believe that the Morlocks are smarter than the Eloi but they seem to understand no more science behind the machine.

The Time Machine presents two very different settings—the 1890s and the distant future. When the Time Traveler jumps into the far future, he finds a society where the Eloi play all day and don't do any work. It's almost like an episode of *Gossip Girl*, where everyone is pretty and rich. In other words, it looks much better than the Time Traveler's own time, which is full of conflict and anxiety over the issue of class—who has to do work and who gets to profit from the work of others. However, the future stops looking good to the Time Traveler when he realizes that the class conflict and class structure of his time have merely evolved rather than being erased. Although some aspects of social class have changed, there are many similarities that should make us sit

up and take notice. So while the future might look like an exaggeration of the 19th century, the novel is making a suggestion about where humans are heading. The Time Traveler belongs to the upper class. And his class affect his interpretation of the social situation of the future. For example, he feels less sympathy for the Morlocks than the Eloi, and he seems to like the Eloi more, though both are his descendant. In the real world today, societies are also divided up by wealth, by race, by religion, and by ideology. "...The Time Traveler hated to have servants waiting at dinner..." Readers usually start to discuss society and class only when the Time Traveler gets to the future, but there are lots of class issues in 1890s London [9]. This is just one reminder that the Time Traveler has servants, as if he were an Eloi. "...Where violence comes but rarely and off-spring are secure, there is less necessity—indeed there is no necessity—for an efficient family, and the specialization of the sexes with reference to their children's needs disappears. Readers can see some beginnings of this even in people's own time, and in this future age it was complete." The Time Traveler makes a few comments like that final line—that the society in the future is merely an extension of things in his present. But this quote is important as a reminder that society doesn't just mean social class; there are all sorts of social issues that have to do with gender as well. In the 1890s they were really nervous about gender distinctions blurring: women becoming less feminine and men less masculine [10]. People still feel that way today, difference between gender in characteristics, physical appearance and social division of labor.

4.2. Achievements

Wells didn't invent the idea of time travel, but Wells did invent the idea of a machine for time travel. Interestingly, although technology is really important in this novel, the Time Traveler doesn't really describe the technology he sees in the future. What he describes most is the effect this technology has had on people. Wells wants to show us not technology for its own sake, but how humans adapt to using that technology and how people can be changed by it. Technology in *The Time Machine* is not always useful. While the Time Traveler seems unprepared for his trip into the future, he has the most important modern technology of all: the scientific method. When he doesn't have technology around, the time traveler uses natural tool, the fire and twigs to protect himself. In *The Time Machine*, people try to control natural forces with technology, but those forces can never be fully controlled. The time traveler never came back after his second travel, and what happened in the future to delay his return?

5. Conclusion

After reading *The Time Machine* and looking deep into its plots and them, much can be learnt for us modern human beings. Wells invented the idea of a machine for time travel, which had long been the simple and mysterious dream of the whole species. It is how humans adapt to using science and

technology and how the society can be changed by it that is intended in this novel by Wells. That is, science is about a way of thinking. *The Time Machine* also raises reader's attention, alarmingly, to the class conflict and class structure in modern society, the discrimination related to gender, race, class and financial status existing everywhere on this planet, and the chase after comfort, enjoyment and convenience, which may lead human beings to a direction depicted in the novel's imagined future.

There are many interesting things in this novel worth of more detailed reading and deeper thinking. This is what attracts readers the most.

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