

The cover features several stylized, light green leaf motifs scattered across a yellow background. Each motif consists of a stem with two leaves pointing upwards and to the right.

H. G. WELLS'S THE TIME MACHINE

A Reference Guide

John R. Hammond

 *Greenwood*
PUBLISHING GROUP

H. G. Wells's
The Time Machine



H. G. Wells at the time of publication of *The Time Machine*, 1895.

H. G. Wells's
The Time Machine

A REFERENCE GUIDE

John R. Hammond

PRAEGER

Westport, Connecticut
London

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Hammond, J. R. (John R.), 1933–

H. G. Wells's *The time machine* : a reference guide / John R. Hammond.
p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references (p.) and index.

ISBN 0-313-33007-7 (alk. paper)

1. Wells, H. G. (Herbert George), 1866–1946. *Time Machine*. 2. Literature and science—Great Britain—History—20th century. 3. Science fiction, English—History and criticism. 4. Time travel in literature. I. Title.

PR5774.T53H42 2004

823'.912—dc22 2004050966

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data is available.

Copyright © 2004 by John R. Hammond

All rights reserved. No portion of this book may be reproduced, by any process or technique, without the express written consent of the publisher.

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 2004050966

ISBN: 0-313-33007-7

First published in 2004

Praeger Publishers, 88 Post Road West, Westport, CT 06881

An imprint of Greenwood Publishing Group, Inc.

www.praeger.com

Printed in the United States of America



The paper used in this book complies with the Permanent Paper Standard issued by the National Information Standards Organization (Z39.48-1984).

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Copyright Acknowledgments

The author and publisher gratefully acknowledge permission for use of the following material:

Excerpts from *The Time Machine* are reproduced by permission of A. P. Watt Ltd. on behalf of the Literary Executors of the Estate of H. G. Wells.

From *H. G. Wells*, by John Batchelor, Cambridge University Press, 1985. Reprinted with the permission of Cambridge University Press.

From "The Publication of *The Time Machine* 1894–5," by Bernard Bergonzi, *Review of English Studies*, February 1960. Reprinted with the permission of Oxford University Press.

From *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, by Joseph Campbell, Paladin, 1988. Reprinted by permission of HarperCollins Publishers Ltd. Copyright © Joseph Campbell, 1988.

From *A Dictionary of Symbols*, by J. E. Cirlot, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981. Reprinted by permission of Thomson Publishing Services.

From *H. G. Wells*, by Michael Draper, Macmillan, 1987. Reprinted by permission of Palgrave Macmillan.

From *A Dictionary of Modern Critical Terms*, by Roger Fowler, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1987. Reprinted by permission of Thomson Publishing Services.

From *The Definitive Time Machine*, by Harry M. Geduld, Indiana University Press, 1987. Reprinted by permission of the author.

From "The Significance of Weena," by J. R. Hammond, *The Wellsian*, no. 18, Winter 1995. Reprinted by permission of the Editor of *The Wellsian*.

From *The Logic of Fantasy: H. G. Wells and Science Fiction*, by John Huntington, Columbia University Press, 1982. Reprinted by permission of Columbia University Press.

From *Editor: A Volume of Autobiography*, by Kingsley Martin, Hutchinson, 1968. Reproduced by permission of PFD on behalf of the Estate of Kingsley Martin. Copyright © Kingsley Martin, 1968.

From "The Logic of 'Prophecy' in *The Time Machine*," by Robert M. Philmus, included in *H. G. Wells: A Collection of Critical Essays*, edited by Bernard Bergonzi, Prentice Hall, 1976. Reprinted by permission of the author.

From *H. G. Wells's Perennial Time Machine*, edited by George Slusser, Patrick Parrinder, and Daniele Chatelain, University of Georgia Press, 2001. Reprinted by permission of The University of Georgia Press.

Every reasonable effort has been made to trace the owners of copyrighted materials in this book, but in some instances this has proven impossible. The author and publisher will be glad to receive information leading to more complete acknowledgments in subsequent printings of the book and in the meantime extend their apologies for any omissions.

This page intentionally left blank

Contents

Preface	ix
1 Introduction	1
2 Content	19
3 Texts	35
4 Contexts	55
5 Ideas	69
6 Narrative Art	87
7 Reception	113
Glossary	123
Bibliographical Essay	127
Index	147

This page intentionally left blank

Preface

The first novel of a writer who subsequently achieves literary renown is always of intrinsic interest, since invariably the author in his earliest work expresses much of his personality and attitude to life. In Wells's case an examination of *The Time Machine* is peculiarly rewarding, for the writing of it represents not simply his literary apprenticeship—the process through which he transformed himself from a little-known journalist to an imaginative writer—but his first attempt to embody in fictional form his deeply felt convictions concerning the nature of man. It is of fundamental interest to the student of his work and has always been the most discussed and most celebrated of all his scientific romances. Of all his vast output of fiction it is *The Time Machine* that seems certain to ensure for Wells a permanent niche in literary history.

Its importance goes far beyond its stature as a work of fiction. Wells's scientific romance is now acknowledged as a key text in the history of ideas, for the concept of time travel has exercised a profound influence on human thought. Moreover, the novel has made a seminal contribution to the ongoing debate concerning the future course of evolution. As a work of futurology, a literary text, an imaginative romance, and an allegory on the human condition it has exercised a potent influence on generations of readers.

The Time Machine is widely studied in universities, yet there is comparatively little critical material available of practical use to students. The student wishing to engage with this text needs a reference guide to assist him or her in getting to grips with the novel. What is needed

is a basic guide that offers an overview of the novel, places it in its literary and biographical context, examines its use of language and imagery, and summarizes its critical reception during the century and more since its publication. This *Reference Guide* aims to fill this need.

It begins with an introductory chapter that traces Wells's life up to the publication of *The Time Machine*. Of particular relevance is the account of his early life, his reading and literary ambitions, and the impact of T. H. Huxley and Uppark on his imagination. Chapter 2 explores the content of the novel with a chapter-by-chapter plot summary. Chapter 3, "Texts," examines the novel's genesis and traces the evolution of the novel from its earliest version published in 1888 to the publication of the text we know today in 1895, noting the significance of *The Time Machine* as Wells's first novel and the care with which it is composed.

Chapter 4, "Contexts," examines the background to the writing of the novel, including the literary and cultural context, the impact of science and invention, the hierarchical nature of Victorian society, and the bearing of Darwin's theory of evolution on its conception. This chapter also discusses the novel's significance as a work written at the end of the century, when fiction was increasingly preoccupied with speculation concerning the future.

The next chapter, "Ideas," takes a close look at the novel's major themes, including the idea of change, utopia and anti-utopia, the extinction of man, and a history of the future. It also looks at the significance of *The Time Machine* from the point of view of Wells's psychology, noting its relevance as a study in disentanglement. This chapter also poses the question "what happens next?" and looks at the reasons why Wells never attempted to write a sequel.

Chapter 6, "Narrative Art," analyzes his literary craftsmanship, closely examining the imagery, language, and narrative techniques employed in the novel including Wells's use of irony, classical and romantic imagery, and the symbolism of dreams. This chapter also looks at the significance of Weena, a character who plays a pivotal role in the novel, and at the central importance of the white sphinx.

Chapter 7, "Reception," focuses on the publication of the novel, looking in particular at the circumstances surrounding its launch, its critical reception, and the significance of the early reviews that appraised the story from literary, scientific, prophetic, and moral standpoints.

The *Reference Guide* concludes with a glossary and bibliographical essay. The essay surveys critical and scholarly approaches to *The Time Machine* during the twentieth century, noting Wells's own attitudes to the novel and to the idea of time travel, the beginnings of serious aca-

demic scrutiny of the text, and the main lines of discussion emerging since Wells's death in 1946. The bibliographical essay also looks at critical editions of the novel and its importance as one of the founding texts of science fiction.

I hope that this *Reference Guide* will be found useful both by the student and by the general reader. I have tried throughout to bear in mind David Daiches's observation that literary criticism "is not an end in itself, but a means to greater understanding and appreciation of literary works." If this guide encourages more readers to return to *The Time Machine* and to follow it with heightened insight and enjoyment, my end will have been served.

A NOTE ABOUT EDITIONS

Page references to the text of *The Time Machine* in the following chapters are to the World's Classics edition of the novel, edited by Patrick Parrinder (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996). Quotations from *The Time Machine* are cited parenthetically within the text.

This page intentionally left blank

1

Introduction

I once told H. G. Wells and, after reflection, he agreed with my analysis, that at least two people struggled inside him, Herbert and George. Bert reacted; George dreamed.

—Kingsley Martin, *Editor: A Volume of Autobiography* (1968)

In the spring of 1888 an unknown young man named Herbert George Wells submitted the fragment of a novel to the journal of his former college in London. It was published in three installments under the title *The Chronic Argonauts*. It is a strange, gothic tale describing an eccentric inventor who claims to travel through time on a machine called the *Chronic Argo*. The author realized the imperfections of the story and over the next few years continued to revise and reshape it in the hope that one day it would find a commercial publisher.

Let us take a closer look at this unknown author.

BEGINNINGS

He was then a thin, fair-haired young man who was already aware of deep divisions within his own temperament—divisions that were to fracture his work throughout his life.

He had been born at Bromley, Kent, in 1866, the son of Joseph and Sarah Wells, who kept a crockery and hardware shop on the Bromley High Street. Joseph was a vigorous, untidy, outdoor man who had formerly been a professional gardener; he was unconventional and

skeptical. In contrast his wife Sarah was deeply religious and orthodox; she believed the greatest virtues in life were respectability and devotion to duty. She was determined that her three sons—Frank, Frederick, and Herbert George—should all become drapers, as she regarded this as a most gentlemanly occupation.

Both in his public and private life H.G. was to be pulled in opposite directions by these competing drives—toward duty and responsibility on one hand and toward waywardness and skepticism on the other. This is evident in much of his writing and was to surface, for example, in *Love and Mr. Lewisham* and *The History of Mr Polly*, both of which feature a hero who is torn between conflicting drives. It is even more evident in his short story "The Door in the Wall" (1906), where a successful politician is torn between the pursuit of his career and a quest for an enchanted garden.

The young H.G. was a precocious boy, much given to reading, drawing, and writing. At home there were books including the works of Washington Irving, Dickens and Chaucer, George Eliot's *Middlemarch*, bound volumes of *Punch*, and an edition of Captain Cook's *Travels*. He wrote later: "The home was poverty-struck and shabby but not unhappy; if food was sometimes rather short there was plenty to read, for Joseph Wells had a taste for reading and would go to sales to pick up a cheap lot of books whenever opportunity offered."¹

As a boy he wrote and illustrated a number of narratives told in comic-strip form, one of which, *The Desert Daisy*, ran to ninety pages and was published in facsimile in 1957.² *The Desert Daisy* is notable for its irreverent attitude to institutions and conventions. Wells pokes gentle fun at the government, the monarchy, the army, and the church, and he shows a deep interest in the details of warfare. It also reveals a fascination with the mechanics of publishing, including as it does a "Preface to the First Edition," an "Editor's Preface," "press notices," a "Preface to the Second Edition," and a "Summary of Contents." It is a remarkable achievement for a boy of thirteen and reveals that already he had a keen interest in writing.

In 1880 the Wells household fell apart. Joseph was now heavily lame as a result of an accident (he had fallen from a ladder while pruning a grapevine). Hitherto he had been able to supplement the meager shop income by acting as a cricket coach, but the injury to his leg meant that his cricketing days were over. In the meantime Sarah, who had formerly been a lady's maid at Uppark, West Sussex, was offered the post of housekeeper at the great house. As she had always disliked the life at Bromley she had no hesitation in accepting the post, leaving Joseph to cope on his own in the shop and thrusting her youngest son H.G. into the world of employment.

Wells left school at fourteen and after a series of “false starts” in life, including working in a chemist’s shop and a brief trial spell at a drapery shop in Windsor, his mother insisted that he should be apprenticed as a shop assistant at a drapery store in Southsea, near Portsmouth. Wells endured the long hours and tedium for two years but then rebelled, insisting that he be allowed to cancel his indentures and resume his full-time education.

He walked the seventeen miles from Southsea to Uppark in order to plead his case with his mother. He was desperately unhappy, for it seemed to him that he was trapped in a dead-end occupation (shop assistants at that time had to work a thirteen-hour day) with little prospect of advancement. Clearly he felt he had reached a turning point in his life and that he must convince his mother of his determination to improve his lot.

With great reluctance Sarah Wells agreed, though inwardly she must have felt that he was making a grave mistake, and in September 1883 at the age of seventeen he joined the staff of Midhurst Grammar School as an assistant master. He did so well there that he won a scholarship to the Normal School of Science (now the Imperial College of Science, Technology, and Medicine) in London, where he commenced full-time studies in September 1884.

He was fascinated by the teeming possibilities of science, and as a student at Midhurst Grammar School and a biology student under T. H. Huxley, he worked extremely hard to master a wealth of scientific knowledge. He was consumed with a vision of life as an evolutionary process in which “every day and every hour, every living thing is being weighed in the balance and found sufficient or wanting,”³ and inspired by a sense of all that science might do for human well-being. At the same time he was distracted by romantic drives, in which he was beckoned by visions of beautiful goddesses, the poetry of Shelley and Keats, and the prophetic writings of William Blake. The scientist in him led to ambitions of being a teacher or a research student, of finding a practical outlet for his fascination with biology. The romantic in him led him to write poetry and fiction, to dream of lovely encounters and find enchantment in the works of Whitman and Rousseau. This divergence between rational and emotional, classical and romantic, is evident in all his work.

Wells’s student years at South Kensington were characterized by much speculation regarding the nature of the fourth dimension. On 14 January 1887 he heard a paper on “The Fourth Dimension” given by his fellow student E. A. Hamilton-Gordon to the Debating Society (later printed in the *Science Schools Journal*). It was this paper that gave Wells the germ of the idea of a four-dimensional geometry:

We must first of all imagine a figure in a plane to be endowed with senses of sight, touch, and hearing. Now let a solid body approach the plane; so long as it remains outside the plane it will be absolutely invisible, but as soon as it enters it, there will become visible that section of the solid that is made by the plane; and if the solid continued moving, different sections would be continually presented to view; finally, when the solid had passed through the plane, it would suddenly and mysteriously vanish, and the thought-endowed plane figure would be unable to conceive whence it came or whither it went.

Moreover, if there were some impenetrable object in the plane, such as an impassable line, so that figures in the plane could not pass it, it would form no obstacle whatever to a solid body, which would pass through, or rather, round it, quite unconsciously; so that it could enter enclosed places that would be quite unattainable to bodies moving in the plane alone.⁴

What Wells does in *The Chronic Argonauts* and later in *The Time Machine* is to seize on this idea, let his imagination play upon it, and cast it into a literary form through the device of time traveling.

Although Hamilton-Gordon himself rejected the notion that time is the fourth dimension, he had undoubtedly planted a seed in Wells's mind. By speculating on the nature of the fourth dimension and raising the possibility of constructing a geometry based upon it, he provided Wells with the initial spark that eventually became *The Time Machine*.

The fundamental notion Wells derived from discussions in the Debating Society is that "the normal present is a three-dimensional section of a four-dimensional universe" and that the only difference between the time dimension and the others "lay in the movement of consciousness along it."⁵ This was the seed that germinated in his mind and that bore such spectacular results in his first novel.

As early as 1885, when he was nineteen, he had presented a paper to the student Debating Society under the title "The Past and Future of the Human Race," showing that his thoughts were already turning to the future of humanity. This was eventually published in a thoroughly revised form as "The Man of the Year Million," in which he boldly speculates on the probable course of evolution:

The theory of evolution is now universally accepted by zoologists and botanists, and it is applied unreservedly to man. Some question, indeed, whether it fits his soul, but all agree it accounts for

his body. Man, we are assured, is descended from ape-like ancestors, moulded by circumstances into men, and these apes again were derived from ancestral forms of a lower order, and so up from the primordial protoplasmic jelly. Clearly, then, man, unless the order of the universe has come to an end, will undergo further modification in the future, and at last cease to be man, giving rise to some other type of animated being. At once the fascinating question arises, What will this being be?⁶

The essential idea that Wells imbibed from Huxley is that *Homo sapiens* is not the apex of creation but simply a finite species that has emerged after a long process of adaptation and evolution, and that the species will continue to evolve in ways that cannot at present be foreseen. What fascinated him as a student was the question of the form this future evolution would take. His biological studies convinced him that the course of evolution would be far more problematic than the facile assumptions of utopian writers would suggest.

Throughout his student years and the years immediately following, he contributed articles, verse, and stories to the *Science Schools Journal* under a variety of pseudonyms—Walker Glockenhammer, Septimus Browne, Sosthenes Smith, Tyro, and H. G. Wheels—as well as contributions that would be published under his own name.

These pieces include two short stories, “The Devotee of Art” and “Walcote: A Tale of the Twentieth Century,” which is a humorous account of the application of a perpetual-motion machine to the London Underground; and “A Vision of the Past,” in which the narrator dreams he is in an age of reptilian monsters who are convinced that *they* are the lords of creation and that the world was made for *them*. In later years Wells was inclined to be very disparaging about these early writings; they were, he said, “imitative puerile stuff.”⁷ But writers can be very unreliable commentators on their own work. Despite his reservations there is much of interest in these early essays and stories. In such pieces as “A Talk with Gryllotalpa” and “A Vision of the Past” there is abundant evidence of the narrative skill and facility with words that was later to stand him in such good stead, and in a story such as “The Devotee of Art” there is ample promise of greater things to come.⁸

After a promising start as a science student he left the college in the summer of 1887 without a degree. In his first year he had found Thomas Henry Huxley an inspiring teacher of biology, but his tutors during his second and third years, Professor Guthrie (physics) and Professor Judd (geology) were lackluster by comparison. Also, he was increasingly distracted by other interests: writing for the *Science Schools*