

**LIMNING THE IMPOSSIBLE: TIME TRAVEL, THE UNCANNY AND DESTRUCTIVE FUTURITY  
IN H. G. WELLS'S *THE TIME MACHINE***

KATRINA HARACK

To travel through time is to confront the impossibility of synchronous presence and absence, to enact *the impossible*.<sup>1</sup> In H. G. Wells's *The Time Machine: An Invention*, such an overtly impossible act is imagined to be possible, allowing Wells to explore the nature of time and possibilities for the development of humankind.<sup>2</sup> The novel is a deeply psychological portrayal of the present and the future, for the Time Traveller relates all that he sees in the distant future (and even at the end of human time) to the 'present' of late-Victorian London that he has left behind. As his tale demonstrates, any witnessing of the future is, in actuality, inextricable from one's own time, place and consciousness. Indeed, as Emmanuel Levinas notes, 'Anticipation of the future and projection of the future [...] are but the present of the future and not the authentic future; the future is what is not grasped, what befalls us and lays hold of us. The other is the future'.<sup>3</sup>

Levinas's statement reveals the 'otherness' of the future (and of death) as essentially incomprehensible, even as we project different possibilities based on our knowledge of the present. Wells engages with this dangerous incomprehensibility through the figure of the Time Traveller, a man who seemingly represents the pinnacle of late-Victorian scientific progress and knowledge but who ultimately fails to maintain his sense of self in the future. He encounters a society so alien yet so undeniably connected to himself that he returns broken and unable to live in what was once his 'present' existence. What he confronts is the 'uncanniness' of the future, for

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<sup>1</sup> While the fictional possibility of time travel forms the basis of H. G. Wells's narrative, my analysis is oriented toward explaining the *imaginative* engagement with the future as a psychological impasse – one cannot forecast a future without projecting something of one's own time into its description. However, scientists still explain the seeming impossibility of time travel in terms of a physical occupation of time and space. For a useful summary of the objections to the possibility of time travel see Christopher Ray's book *Time, Space, and Philosophy* (London and New York: Routledge, 1991). Nicholas Ruddick has also pointed out that Wells's 'time machine has the (frankly miraculous) ability to travel in time without moving in space. This uncanny unity of place greatly strengthens the complex temporal theme and adds to the horror of (and the dinner-guests' resistance to) the Time Traveller's narrative' (Nicholas Ruddick, "'Tell Us All About Little Rosebery': Topicality and Temporality in H. G. Wells's *The Time Machine*", *Science Fiction Studies* 28:3 [2001], 344).

<sup>2</sup> All textual citations are to H. G. Wells, *The Time Machine*, ed. Nicholas Ruddick (Peterborough, Ont.: Broadview, 2001).

<sup>3</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Time and the Other*, trans. Richard A. Cohen (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1987), 76-77.

even though his journey is to some extent an encounter with the unfamiliar, an enactment of the impossible, it is inextricably connected to his selfhood and his perceptions of the world.

With the ever-increasing Victorian interest in scientific development and evolutionary theory, authors and scientists alike were speculating about the end of civilization. Indeed, the topic of time travel in the novel signals the Victorian concern with what Norman and Jeanne Mackenzie call ‘the problem of time’.<sup>4</sup> As they note, ‘It was not merely the new biology that was evolutionary [...]. The new geology, the new astronomy, the new mathematics and the new physics were all sciences vitally concerned with time’.<sup>5</sup> This concern naturally carried over into speculations about *human* actions in time.<sup>6</sup> Wells himself, in a letter to the editor of *British Weekly* dated 26 June 1939, states that despite his personal insistence on ‘the insecurity of progress and the possibility of human degeneration and extinction’, he thinks that ‘the odds are against man but that it is still worthwhile in spite of the odds’.<sup>7</sup> He concludes with the laconic remark, ‘I decline to stampede’.<sup>8</sup> Wells understood the possibility that human time was neither infinite nor progressive, and his vision of the future largely depends on projecting characteristics of his own society into an essentially unknowable ‘place’ where, ironically, much is recognisable to the Victorian mind.

He begins the novel, then, with an elaborate presentation of ‘types’ from his society. The frame narrator (who controls the entire narrative) describes the men gathered in the Time Traveller’s parlour, each of whom represents various stations in society. These men make incredulous and somewhat ignorant replies to the Time Traveller’s theories about the fourth dimension, which is portrayed as the dimension of time itself along which an individual

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<sup>4</sup> Norman and Jeanne Mackenzie, *The Time Traveller: The Life of H. G. Wells* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1973), 121. Wells had published essays on the topic of human development, but was disgusted by the general populace’s willingness to exist solely in the present – their unwillingness to see the various *possibilities* for ‘the continual adaptation of plastic life’ in relation to unknown future conditions (H. G. Wells, ‘The Man of the Year Million: A Scientific Forecast’, *Pall Mall Gazette* 57 [6 November 1893], 3). As Wells argued, these possibilities were not necessarily positive.

<sup>5</sup> Mackenzie and Mackenzie, *The Time Traveller*, 121-22.

<sup>6</sup> As Wells himself notes in ‘Zoological Retrogression’, ‘There is [...] no guarantee in scientific knowledge of man’s permanence or permanent ascendancy [...]. The presumption is that before him lies a long future of profound modification, but whether this will be, according to his present ideals, upward or downward, no one can forecast’ (H. G. Wells, ‘Zoological Retrogression’, *Gentleman’s Magazine* 271 [September 1891], 246-53).

<sup>7</sup> H. G. Wells, *The Correspondence of H. G. Wells*, 4 vols., ed. David C. Smith (London: Pickering & Chatto, 1998), IV, 227.

<sup>8</sup> Wells *The Correspondence of H. G. Wells*, IV, 227.

consciousness can move.<sup>9</sup> There did exist in Wells's scientific circles a few basic theories regarding the fourth dimension, but Wells's *particular* innovation is in the concept of a machine capable of travelling in this dimension.<sup>10</sup> The fictional device of the time machine allows Wells to examine the possibilities of human development in a way that had never been seen in popular fiction. Ironically, as the Time Traveller 'frees' his mind from a three-dimensional existence, essentially freeing himself from an existence in the present, he is ultimately unable to handle the strain of confronting himself 'out of time', of seeing himself in the alterity of the future. Thus, as Wells goes beyond pre-existing imaginative limits in order to present his perspectives on society, he reveals the deep uncertainties and dangers inherent in attempting to grasp the unknown.

The strangeness of this hitherto unknown dimension is made apparent throughout the Time Traveller's tale. As I examine the properties of the projected future made accessible by this machine, I will obliquely refer to Sigmund Freud's seminal essay 'The Uncanny' which provides an explanation of psychological responses to alterity.<sup>11</sup> In this essay, Freud states that the German word for the uncanny, *unheimlich*, refers to that which is familiar yet unfamiliar, producing the sense of something 'not quite right'; it involves an intuition of the 'not-right' that goes beyond surface appearances even as it reacts to them. Freud also shows how the uncanny can be called 'the name for everything that ought to have remained [...] hidden and secret and has become visible' (129), thereby sharing its meaning with its opposite, *heimlich*, which can mean

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<sup>9</sup> There are several possible sources for Wells's ideas concerning the fourth dimension. He was familiar with Edwin A. Abbott's novel *Flatland* (1884) about a two-dimensional world in which multiple dimensions were postulated. Another influence on Wells, but from more scientific circles, came from C. H. Hinton's article, 'What is the Fourth Dimension?', in which the mathematical possibility of a fourth dimension is discussed. Simon Newcomb, who is actually mentioned in Wells's novel, found that this dimension allows 'room for an indefinite number of universes, all alongside of each other, as there is for an indefinite number of sheets of paper when we pile them upon each other' ('Modern Mathematical Thought', *Nature* 49 [1 February 1894], 328). Finally, in an anonymous letter to *Nature*, to which Wells often contributed, there is the first postulation of the fourth dimension *as time*, as well as 'a new kind of space for its existence, which we may call time-space' ('S,' 'Four-Dimensional Space', Letter to the Editor, *Nature* 31 [26 March 1885], 481). Wells only ever admitted that his ideas about time and the fourth dimension were formed in response to student discussions at the Normal School of Science and his reading in this area.

<sup>10</sup> Wells stated that he never intended the time machine to be considered an 'actual' possibility. Rather, as he wrote in 1931, he was limited to the theories of his time and to the limits of his genre: 'I was not sufficiently educated in that field [physics], and certainly a story was not the way to investigate further. So my opening exposition escapes along the line of paradox to an imaginative romance stamped with many characteristics of the Stevenson and early-Kipling period in which it was written' (H. G. Wells, 'Preface', in *The Time Machine: An Invention* [New York: Random House, 1931], pp. vii-x).

<sup>11</sup> Sigmund Freud, 'The Uncanny', in *On Creativity and the Unconscious* (New York: Harper, 1958). All further references to this book will appear parenthetically in the text.

‘concealed, kept from sight [...] secret’ (127). In terms of *The Time Machine*, Wells’s very act of exploring that which has never been explored in fiction or in life – the effects and visions of the future produced by time travel – produces decidedly uncanny effects that linger with the reader long after the book has been finished.

Let us turn, then, to the moment when the narrator describes the intrusion of the model of the time machine into the comfortable home-like space of the Time Traveller’s parlour. The men are all enjoying that “luxurious after-dinner atmosphere, when thought runs gracefully free of the trammels of precision” (12) and the Time Traveller brings forth his model of the time machine, causing it to move into the fourth dimension and disappear. As the narrator remarks, unless the explanation of the fourth dimension is to be accepted, the disappearance “is an absolutely unaccountable thing” (65). The narrator had been prepared for the ability of the machine to do something strange by the Time Traveller’s description of it, for it “looks singularly askew, and [...] there is an odd twinkling appearance about this bar, as though it was in some way unreal” (65). Although the narrator remains sceptical of the machine’s disappearance, he does not dismiss the *possibility* that it has moved into the fourth dimension. Here, the very fixity of matter is questioned, as is the permanence of one’s existence in time. The disappearance of the model, which reveals capabilities never before imagined, redefines the home-like space by making it unstable, full of deceptive possibilities.

As the tale progresses, this sense of uneasiness is intensified, for we are soon confronted with the *human* side of time travel. At a dinner party the following week, the Time Traveller arrives late and dishevelled, and he launches into a description of his experience of travel into the future, as well as the sensations of time travel. These sensations result from travelling where no human being has ever travelled, from displacing himself (both physically and mentally) into a new and entirely unexplored dimension. He seems to acknowledge this fact with his statement that “I suppose a suicide who holds a pistol to his skull feels much the same wonder at what will come next as I felt then” (76). Here death represents that which has always remained unknown and unintelligible to human beings. As Levinas has shown, death never exists in the present, for our relationship with death ‘is a unique relationship with the future [a] relation with something that is absolutely other’.<sup>12</sup> The Time Traveller thus confronts the thought of travelling through

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<sup>12</sup> Levinas, *Time and the Other*, 71-74.

time with the same trepidation and ignorance with which one faces the alterity of death. To reiterate Levinas, ‘The very relationship with the other is the relationship with the future.’<sup>13</sup> To travel through time *is* to encounter an altered landscape of the self, an exteriority which is not in fact an actual exteriority.<sup>14</sup>

This uneasy relationship between the future and the self (as defined by the present) is also expressed in the Time Traveller’s additional descriptions of the sensations of time travel: “‘I am afraid I cannot convey the peculiar sensations of time travelling. They are excessively unpleasant [...]. I felt the same horrible anticipation, too, of an imminent smash. [W]ith a kind of madness growing upon me, I flung myself into futurity’” (77-78). As the Time Traveller wings through time, he remarks upon the “‘absolute strangeness of everything, the sickly jarring and swaying of the machine, above all, the feeling of prolonged falling’” (79). Such disturbing sensations seem to be connected to a new perception of time, for unlike the men in his drawing-room gatherings, the Time Traveller is no longer trapped in the present. His ‘freedom’ is hard-won, for these sensations absolutely upset his nerves, especially as he becomes cognisant of the dangers of suddenly appearing in the same place and time as something else. As David C. Cody remarks, this physical and mental response to time travel ‘is triggered by the realisation that an ontological border (between the normal and the abnormal, the safe and the unsafe) has been violated’<sup>15</sup> and the Traveller has become aware that as soon as he materialises he will have to deal with the dangers of an alternate reality.

Indeed, the Time Traveller tells the dinner guests of being thrown headlong from his time machine with the suddenness of his arrival, confronting a world both familiar and strangely askew, a world populated by beings who both amaze and horrify him. He lands in a garden with recognisable flowers, although much remains “‘invisible’” (79) because of a hailstorm. Kirby Farrell notes that the psychic plot of the novel functions ‘as a mode of self-analysis, ambiguously

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<sup>13</sup> Levinas, *Time and the Other*, 77.

<sup>14</sup> Such an idea was, in fact, later put forth by Wells in a lecture to the Royal Institution on 24 January 1902 entitled ‘The Discovery of the Future’ (H. G. Wells, ‘The Discovery of the Future’, *Nature* 65 [1902], 326). In this speech he states that ‘The portion of the future that *must remain darkest and least accessible* is the individual future’ (my emphasis).

<sup>15</sup> David. C. Cody, ‘Faulkner, Wells, and the End of Man’, *Journal of Modern Literature* 18:4 (1995), 469.

self-aware' that 'half-recognises but cannot confront the appalling monster potential in the self'.<sup>16</sup> This 'monster potential' is reflected in the Time Traveller's relationships with the Eloi and the Morlocks, the two races inhabiting this world. Even as the Eloi and the Morlocks represent opposite poles of Victorian society (the workers and the upper class, the labourers and the aesthetes), they also function as projections of the Time Traveller's inherent duality, a fact that he refuses to recognise.

As a result, in his first encounter with the Eloi, he comments upon their beauty, grace and overwhelming frailty but removes himself from any real identification with them. In fact, he overcomes his initial fear of the landscape after his first sight of the Eloi, for these "fragile thing[s] out of futurity" touch him with "soft little tentacles", speak in their "sweet and liquid tongue" (82) and laugh at him with an amazing absence of fear. Before long, he reacts to their excessive lack of intellectual curiosity with his own brand of scientific rigor, forming successive hypotheses about how this world developed. However, even at this early stage, he continually questions his own hypotheses and he warns his listeners in his own time about how far his thoughts "fell short of the reality" (89). Such statements create a pervasive sense of doubt regarding any proposed 'truth' about this future society, leaving the reader in a realm of textual uncertainty.

As if to heighten this sense of uncertainty even further, the Time Traveller soon remarks that he believes his successive hypotheses "had mastered the problem of the world – mastered the whole secret of these delicious people" (93), subconsciously revealing how he saw these people as beings to be 'mastered'. Although he identifies human-like characteristics in them, he maintains an aloof disdain towards their degeneration and even describes them as "delicious", thereby signalling his desire to mentally devour and understand this world. This description also links him to the Morlocks, who steal his machine and seem to represent the more violent and dangerous side of humanity, that which could degenerate to cannibalism. They dwell in the darkness underground, a darkness that is permeated by the thud of machinery. The Time Traveller knows that something hidden and secret is lurking in the darkness, for he remarks that he "was sensible of much which was unseen" (101). Indeed, the uncanniness of the situation is

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<sup>16</sup> Kirby Farrell, *Post-Traumatic Culture: Injury and Interpretation in the Nineties* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 115.

intensified by the sense of unknown forces at work.<sup>17</sup> He becomes quite discomfited by the partially incomprehensible landscape that surrounds him, and the ever-increasing presence of the Morlocks intensifies his fear.

Indeed, at the moment when he realises that his machine has been stolen, he demonstrates his fear and desperation through violent thoughts against the Eloi: “I had the hardest task in the world to keep my hands off their pretty laughing faces” (97). Perhaps their vapid expressions reflect something of himself that he cannot bear to recognise. He has lost control of the situation, and can no longer distance himself from events quite so objectively as before. His degeneration occurs in counterpoint to the increasing presence of the Morlocks, for in the dark of night, he dreams of being drowned and having “sea-anemones” (104) feeling over his face “with their soft palps” (104). Upon waking, he believes that he has seen “ghosts” or “white figures [...] mere creatures of the half-light” (105). Finally, in an actual encounter with one of these very real creatures, he finds that “it was a dull white, and had strange large grayish-red eyes; also that there was flaxen hair on its head and down its back” (107). According to David Lake, the Morlocks actually serve as reminders of death, for both the Time Traveller and all of humankind. He states that

The deathly associations of the Morlocks explain most of their horror. What is being repressed, what erupts from the well-shafts under the waning moon, is the fear of personal and racial death. [T]he Time Traveller does not regard the Morlocks as human, because he has subconsciously equated them with the great and last Enemy.<sup>18</sup>

In this way the Time Traveller confronts something of the absolute ‘otherness’ of death in these ape-like creatures, although he attempts to deal with this alterity by explaining it in terms of

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<sup>17</sup> This sense of unknown forces at work may be linked to the Victorian preoccupation with the nature of technology and industrialisation, for with the advent of machinery much of the actual labour that went into producing economic commodities was hidden behind factory walls, with the noise that was produced being heard by the public but the work itself remaining unseen. Wells would seem to extrapolate the societal fear of ‘hidden’ mechanisation and labour and all the force it withheld into the putative race of Morlocks, who dwell in the darkness underground, produce all the actual commodities for the Eloi and do all the work with machinery of some kind, and (it is suggested) come out of the darkness to eat the Eloi during the night.

<sup>18</sup> David J. Lake, ‘The White Sphinx and the Whitened Lemur: Images of Death in *The Time Machine*’, *Science-Fiction Studies* 6:1 (1979), 79.

evolution and class bifurcation. According to him, this “human spider” (107) is part of a species derived from the working classes, and he experiences extreme reactions to the sight of them: “I felt a peculiar shrinking from those pallid bodies [...]. Probably my health was a little disordered [...]. Once or twice I had a feeling of intense fear for which I could perceive no definite reason” (113).

At this point, as the differences between these two types of beings are emphasised (even though both derive from the humans of the Time Traveller’s own time), the Time Traveller becomes increasingly strained in his attempts to hold a coherent presentation of this society together. He carries the projection of his own age into the future, but the strain of facing the duality of the future he encounters, and of viewing himself as related to its beings, causes him to doubt his logical hypotheses. Even when he finally arrives at what he calls his “most plausible” (111) conclusion, that class bifurcation had led to not only “a triumph over nature, but a triumph over nature and the fellow-man” (111), he is forced to reflect that he may be “absolutely wrong” (111). This, though, occurs to him before he finds it necessary to face his fears and descend into the Morlocks’ shaft, a descent that could be seen as a very personal harrowing of hell.

In the darkness of the shaft, he sees a “red joint” (116) sitting on a table, a fact that he later takes as evidence that the Morlocks are cannibals, although everything about this underground world remains inconclusive. Indeed, the Time Traveller perhaps prefers this ambiguity to any real identification he might be forced to form with the Morlocks. He is forced to confront them first-hand, however, when they try to prevent him from leaving the shaft. He is subjected to a rape-like scene where they keep him in darkness, continually clutch at him “more boldly” and make “a queer laughing noise” (117). At this point, the Time Traveller remarks that “You can scarce imagine how nauseatingly inhuman they looked – those pale, chinless faces and great, lidless, pinkish-grey eyes!” (117). Then, as he attempts to ascend out of the Morlocks’ shaft, sensations remarkably like those of time travel come upon him, for he experiences a “deadly nausea”, “faintness” and “all the sensations of falling” (118). These sensations may once again result from seeing what should have remained hidden. As Cody states, ‘In much of the



horror literature produced in the late Victorian and Edwardian periods, characters experience symptoms such as nausea, sickness, and confusion after an encounter with the “uncanny”.<sup>19</sup>

While the Time Traveller experiences discomfort as he tries to distance himself from these “inhuman sons of men” (125), the Morlocks, he is unable to *stop* himself from identifying with the Eloi: “I even tried a Carlyle-like scorn of this wretched aristocracy-in-decay. But this attitude of mind was impossible [...] the Eloi had kept too much of the human form not to claim my sympathy” (125). When he arrives at the Palace of Green Porcelain, actually the remains of a museum, the strain of existing in such a dualistic reality drastically increases and he oscillates between trying to distance himself from the Eloi and trying to distance himself from the Morlocks. Here, where he hopes to gain some conclusive answers, he is reduced to protecting himself with “arms of metal or stone”, trying to “procure some means of fire” and to finding a “battering-ram” (125) with which to break open the panel hiding his machine. These are all such caveman-like contrivances that the Time Traveller appears to be disintegrating before our very eyes.<sup>20</sup> When he realises that the Morlocks are in the museum with him, he pulls a lever from a machine to use as a weapon, stating: “I longed very much to kill a Morlock or so. Very inhuman, you may think, to want to go killing one’s own descendants! But it was impossible, somehow, to feel any humanity in the things” (130). How far the Victorian gentleman has fallen! His lust for violence and lack of composure further remove him from the ideal of the intellectual gentleman, and he is further satirised as he explores the rest of the museum. At one point he even performs a dance that is in part “a modest *cancan*, in part a step dance, in part a skirt dance (so far as my tail-coat permitted), and in part original” (131), thereby reverting to the childlike aestheticism of the Eloi.

Finally, in his last attempt to escape the futuristic landscape in which he is trapped, the Time Traveller confronts the Morlocks in a climactic battle that takes place, quite appropriately, in the dark. He feels the “human rats” nipping at him, and aims the lever at their faces, feeling a

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<sup>19</sup> Cody, ‘Faulkner, Wells, and the End of Man’, 468.

<sup>20</sup> We can also note the profound uncanniness of such a museum of the future. As Lars Gustafsson has remarked, ‘The most striking fact about such a museum is that it will contain, as *memories of the past*, objects and artefacts which belong to *our own future*. And in this museum, such future objects are, of course, presented together with objects which belong to what is also our past’ (Lars Gustafsson, ‘The Present as the Museum of the Future’, in *Utopian Vision, Technological Innovation and Poetic Imagination*, ed. Klaus Berghahn and Grimm-Reinhold [Heidelberg: Winter, 1990], 107). Such a presentation of artefacts is uncanny in its abrogation of the division between imagination and reality, as well as in its presenting ‘secret’ knowledge previously unknown.

“strange exultation” (137) at crushing their skulls. Perhaps, his attempt to aim for their faces is an attempt to erase any reflection of himself in these beings, just as he earlier had to resist hitting the Eloi in the face. It is this very reversion to savagery, however, that allows him to ‘free’ himself from this time and return to his own time. In fact, the Time Traveller’s description of the climactic events (in which the Morlocks, blinded by the fire, are burned alive) as “the most weird and horrible thing” (138) that he beholds in the future would seem to indicate that he feels a strange affinity with their destruction. In the end, however, only his violent self-defence allows him to escape from the Morlocks and their rapacious attack on his identity.

Strangely enough, he does not think to escape *back* in time to his own world, but pushes the lever forward and hurls himself into the more distant future. He seems to witness the end of humanity, and at this terminal point of human time, he finds that they have made no lasting impression on the universe. According to Colin Manlove, the Time Traveller’s disappearance signals his becoming freed from duality at the end of human time: ‘The Time Traveller *has* no environment: he simply travels. His inventiveness, which in itself continually throws his mind out of the present into future projections and plans, becomes, as it were, symbolised in the time machine itself.’<sup>21</sup> Such a hypothesis does, however, ignore the fact that the Time Traveller may be *driven* to exist in and through time by his *inability* to overcome the duality he faces in the world of the Eloi and the Morlocks. With the Time Traveller’s disappearance (seemingly into time itself) at the end of the novel, we are forced to consider his final comments regarding his experiences: “Take it as a lie – or a prophecy. Say I dreamed it in the workshop [...]. Treat my assertion of its truth as a mere stroke of art to enhance its interest” (151). This overt questioning of the truth-value of his tale emphasises the importance of direct experience, giving us the sense that, having confronted the simultaneous alterity and recognizability of this other time, the Time Traveller has experienced such a psychological disruption that he cannot expect to be believed.

Indeed, at the end of dinner he insists on returning to examine the machine: “I must look at that machine. If there is one!” (152). With this final expression of doubt, his guests all follow him to the laboratory to verify that the machine does in fact exist. Later, after the narrator has touched the machine, the Time Traveller flings himself into futurity once again, never to return (at least, not in the course of this narrative). Robert Philmus has argued that this disappearance

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<sup>21</sup> Colin Manlove, ‘Charles Kingsley, H. G. Wells, and the Machine in Victorian Fiction’, *Nineteenth Century Literature* 48:2 (1993), 231-32.

reflects the Time Traveller's insistence that his tale is true, for 'to dramatise the assertion that he has told the literal truth, he must go back into the Fourth Dimension: since he cannot accept the "prophecy" as metaphor, he must disappear into the dimension where it "exists"'.<sup>22</sup> The narrator tells the reader that 'The Time Traveller vanished three years ago. And, as everybody knows now, he has never returned' (154). There is the vaguest suggestion of something gone wrong, of a possible accident, but we are left without conclusive evidence. Most disturbing, perhaps, is the narrator's statement that if the future *will be* as the Time Traveller has said, 'it remains for us to live as though it were not so' (155). How much of an impact has the Time Traveller's tale really had on his contemporaries? We are given no comforting statements regarding change or reform – rather, the very indeterminacy of this conclusion promotes the continual re-examination of Wells's vision of the future in relation to the present. Because Wells was invested in prompting the re-examination of society over time, he used an uncanny mixture of the familiar and unfamiliar, light and dark, civilized and savage in order to present the future as a projection of the Time Traveller himself. In this allegory of the Victorian imagination, the Time Traveller encounters that which he cannot assimilate and upon his return to a 'normal' existence he is unable to face the stagnation of time and humanity that he confronts.

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<sup>22</sup> Robert M. Philmus, 'The Logic of "Prophecy" in *The Time Machine*', in *H. G. Wells: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Bernard Bergonzi (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1976), 67.