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## The Time Machine and the Protocols of Science Fiction

*The Time Machine* by H.G. Wells features horrific creatures from beneath the earth that enslave helpless humans, yet it is rarely if ever described as a horror novel. The tale features an adventurous leading character who manages to find a little romance as he hurtles back and forth through time, but is rarely found sitting on the shelf next to other adventure novels of its era like *Around the World in 80 Days* or *King Solomon's Mines*. *The Time Machine* could arguably fit with the conventions of genre logic that would qualify it as horror or adventure, but instead it is only ever referenced within the realm of science fiction and this universal agreement is due to its precise alignment of themes and motifs which James Gunn outlined in his definition of the genre of science fiction: the existence of a fourth dimension, the evolution of mankind and the prominence of curiosity as an integral component of the human imagination.

The foundational component in Gunn's definition of science fiction—the influence of which stretches across the breadth of his more expansive definition—is that it is a genre centered upon the idea of change and the possibility for the events of a character's timeline to be altered through apprehension of a fourth dimension. The significance of the ability to manipulate time for the purpose of altering the past to change the future is so vital that Wells decided to confirm its implication in the very title of his book. From that title page through to the very last page, the time machine becomes an actual character; arguably an even more fascinating character than the Time Traveler himself. That sense of character is further deepened and made manifestly an aspect of Gunn's denotative description of science fiction by virtue of the genuinely dimensional exploitation of time in which it is used. The titular technology of the novel is not merely used to hurtle the main character back or forward a few decades, but rather across entire epochs.

Through the use of his machine, the Traveler is afforded perhaps the rarest opportunity in the universe: to actually witness firsthand the effects of evolution on his own species. In this way, *The Time Machine* directly confronts another key element of Gunn's definition of science fiction, positing the notion that the “universe is knowable (though it may never be known) and that people are adaptable” (Gunn, 2002).

One might well question whether *The Time Machine* presents a pleasant demonstration of Gunn's assertion that science fiction is fundamentally Darwinian, but it is impossible to deny that it is truly one of the most authentically Darwinian science fiction novels ever written. The book is not a warm and fuzzy vision of Darwinian progress toward perfecting the human species. Absent from the nightmarish future the book presents is any hint of the suggestion that “Darwin's theory of evolution described human beings as being in a constant struggle for survival, but inventions such as electricity, the telephone, and subways promised to make the

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struggle easier and people's lives more manageable" (Galens, 2003). What the future holds in store for humanity is the most overlooked aspect of the entire misapprehended concept of survival of the fittest. The Morlocks may have evolved to become as fit to survive as the Eloi are unfit, but between the two of them, neither seem to possess any capacity for making the evolutionary struggle easier or their lives more manageable. Implicit in the dimensional view of the future spanning epochal time periods that the Traveler witnesses is the reality that there must be something lacking in the genetic strain of humanity in order for evolution to take it to this future condition of living.

While one can fairly argue that some literary genres may be more imaginative than others, the aspect of human imagination that seems more at home in science fiction than any other genre is curiosity and in that respect *The Time Machine* fulfills its definition as an authentic example of science fiction. The Traveler becomes a prototype for the overly curious scientist of every science fiction novel to come whose adventures for good or evil are the result of wanting to know more about the unknown. Those future exercises in science fiction would also turn into a stereotype an essential figure in the construction of the significant of curiosity in science fiction: the doubters and skeptics who gather around and stand in stark contrast to visionary man of science. It is worth keeping in mind that science fiction is a literary genre that is by definition of paradoxical contradiction in terms. Real science is never a fiction and fiction is not a science. As Gunn postulates, "humanity's romantic notions about how life ought to be have no influence on the inexorable facts (the cold equations) of the universe" (2002). Without the doubters and the skeptics there to remind scientists that such things as time travel is patently impossible, the truly visionary curiosity that lies at the center of all great science fiction is lost and with it goes much of the passion that is also a driving force.

Elements of a variety of literary genres can be located within the pages of *The Time Machine* that contribute to one's enjoyment of the novel, but at heart it is undeniably a defining moment in the evolution of science fiction. While the story would certainly suffer with the loss of any its horror or adventure, romantic or fantasy components of the novel, none of its power would be diminished in the absence. That is because the real power of *The Time Machine* as literature is realized from a coherent and unified structure built upon the foundations outlined by Gunn that presents science fiction as a genre preoccupied with a curiosity about the dimensional awareness of the evolutionary struggle of mankind

## Works Cited

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