THE TIME MACHINE

Stephen Law

A strange story about time travel.

Today I journeyed to Richmond, to the laboratory of the time traveller. I was welcomed into the house by the courteous Mrs Watchett, his housekeeper.

Mrs Watchett showed me into the drawing room where a fire was blazing. She explained that the time traveller was travelling through time even as she spoke, and that if we should pass through the next door into his laboratory, I would discover the awful truth about his time machine.

The housekeeper led me through a door into an amazing Victorian laboratory filled with experimental equipment. But the most astonishing thing of all was that there, sat in the saddle of his glittering brass, ivory, and crystal machine, *was the time traveller himself*.

"I thought you were off travelling in time!" I gasped.

There was no reply from the time traveller. In fact, he remained strangely motionless.

"He can't hear you," explained Mrs Watchett.

"But you said he was travelling in time?" I said.

"He is," replied Mrs Watchett.

"But what my genius of an employer failed fully to realize," she continued, "is that if, as he travels into the future, he can still see the laboratory about him – the hands on the clock whizzing round, the sun streaking across the window each day, me buzzing about like a fly, and so on – then *he must still be in the room for the entire period of time through which he travels*. Otherwise how could he see these things?"

I was beginning to understand. The time traveller's machine had merely slowed him right down. His heart beat once a minute. His brain activity had been reduced to a crawl. Just as, from his perspective, we seemed to be

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whizzing about like gnats, from our perspective he appeared frozen like a statue.

"And now it's me that has to dust him every week," continued Mrs Watchett. She took out a feather duster from a drawer and proceeded gently to dislodge a fine layer of dust that had accumulated on his hair.

"He's already been sat here for the last five years," she added crossly. "His nieces and nephews come and hang holly and tinsel on him at Christmas time."

"And he doesn't move at all?" I asked.

"Oh yes, he moves," replied Mrs Watchett. "Only very, very slowly. I have noticed that his eyelids have begun to drop over the last week or so. I think he's blinking."

I walked up to the machine and peered intently at the time traveller. His grey eyes were fixed intently on something across the room, and his eyelids were indeed a little droopy.

"Worst of all," added Mrs Watchett, "he's going to be sat there for the next twenty thousand years. Whose going to do the dusting when I'm gone?"

"Well, time's getting on," I said, and made my excuses.

Apologies to H.G. Wells and Michael Dummett.
Stephen Law is editor of THINK.

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