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“WHEN WE WENT TO SEE THE END OF THE WORLD” (1972)

BY ROBERT SILVERBERG



FOR EAC 234, PROF. LISETTE BOILY©

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WRITING CONTEXT & SF SETTING: SOCIAL SATIRE, THE NEAR FUTURE & 'THE TIME MACHINE'

- ◉ The story was originally published in **1972** but the story's setting is of an imagined future (which, despite the possible time travel machine, seems eerily 'current' with our own time period)
- ◉ More than 50 years after story's publication, Silverberg's satirical critique of American society still seems 'current'
- ◉ the various examples portrayed of social, political, environmental disintegration, seem even more plausible / possible, today
- ◉ **Satire** is an artistic form of critiquing something serious, with the use of humour / social satire is a form of satire critiquing some serious aspect of society, through exaggeration, sarcasm, implicit judgement of perceived negatives
- ◉ **The near future** is a very common and effective type of SF setting
- ◉ **'The time machine'** is a well known SF device, which allows SF authors to explore the consequences of placing characters into different time periods from their own, through the use of a mechanical device, etc., often to highlight some philosophical concepts or socio-economic-political issues



THE BASICS OF THE STORY, AND SOME QUESTIONS

- ◉ A group of privileged, oblivious upper class Americans in the near future take advantage of a new type of exclusive, expensive vacation and, through a time machine go to...See the End of the World! (but return home safely, afterwards, of course)
- ◉ Why would anyone actually want to see the END of the world?
- ◉ Why do these particular characters want to See the End of the World?
- ◉ What kinds of 'ends of the world' do they see? What kinds of ends of the world do they NOT allow themselves to see (either on their time travel trips...or in their own time, at home?)
- ◉ Do these 'time travellers' learn anything from their 'trips'? Do their characters change, at all, as a result of their 'trips'?



SF & LITERARY DEVICES IN THE STORY

(SEE THE GLOSSARY IN THE LESSON MODULE FOR MEANINGS)

- ◉ Setting – approximately when and where the story is set
- ◉ Speculative Scenario
 - related to the social satire and allegory
- ◉ Satire, especially social satire
 - What is this story satirizing?
- ◉ Allegory
 - What is this story an allegory of?
- ◉ In medias res (see the beginning of the story)
- ◉ Title significance (the use of the word 'we' and the past tense are notable)
- ◉ Third Person Narration
- ◉ Irony – all of the types: situational, dramatic, verbal
- ◉ Plot Conflicts (person vs. self, vs. person, vs. nature)
- ◉ the Four Core SF Concepts:
 - Invention & exploration are most prevalent in the story; we don't see much discovery or transformation



SF & LITERARY DEVICES IN THE STORY, CONT'D

(SEE THE GLOSSARY IN THE LESSON MODULE FOR MEANINGS)

- ◉ Humour (related to the social satire and irony (especially dramatic irony))
- ◉ Dialogue
- ◉ Theme (related to the speculative scenario): the main point, big idea the author is trying to get readers to think deeply about (can be explicitly stated or implicitly present – for readers to interpret)
- ◉ Open or closed ending?
 - Why do you think Nick laughs at the end of the story?



TIME TRAVEL, TIME MACHINES & ALLEGORY

- ◉ This story is not really about time travel, itself – how and why?
- ◉ This story does not really highlight or explain the creation of The Time Machine or how it technically or scientifically works
- ◉ This story, in addition to being a social satire, is an ALLEGORY, which uses the common SF devices of time travel and the time machine, to explore that allegory
- ◉ ALLEGORY is related to symbolism but on a much larger scale; a **story is allegorical when the entire story symbolizes a deeper issue present in the world outside the story**
 - What is the deeper issue that this story presents?
- ◉ **What is this story an allegory for? (Hint: the allegory is related to the social satire)**



DEEPER THEMATIC ISSUES & QUESTIONS

The theme is related to the social satire and to the allegory

- What is happening in the 'present' world of the characters (of which they seem oblivious to), while they discuss their competing 'End of the World' time travel trips?
- Why do you think these particular characters may be so oblivious to the 'real' world around them, while they are, ironically, so interested in vacationing to 'the end of the world'?



AN IMPORTANT FINAL NOTE ABOUT ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

- ▶ **Do NOT use any form of generative AI (ChatGPT, advanced Grammarly tools, etc.)**
- ▶ **You are not supposed to ‘research’ the internet for ideas about our assigned short stories....(but if you do):**
 - ▶ **Make sure you quote and cite any and all external sources used in your submissions. (Again, you are NOT supposed to go outside of our course at all; there is no reason to go outside our course IF you are doing your own, authentic learning of the course materials).**
 - ▶ Try engaging what the internet source ‘said’ about the story—what does it mean, do you agree or disagree, etc.?
 - ▶ Always highlight YOUR OWN ideas about any story we cover in the course—if you are confused about a story, it’s okay to say so (asking questions and highlighting what is not understood are the best ways to learn something new!)
 - ▶ **Depending on the amount and severity of the uncited material and/or unauthorized use of generative AI, a zero grade, or a zero grade/failure in the course and a comment on the student’s transcript can result.**



THE END

