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Out of the time machine

by [Theodore Dalrymple](#)

On H. G. Wells's clairvoyance.

A few weeks ago, I emerged from the concert hall into the night of an English provincial city. Somewhat against the militant philistinism of the times, which contrives to combine the vices of the demotic with those of elitist bureaucratic control, the city still maintains a fine orchestra, rather as evolved creatures retain vestigial organs that were once vital to their animal economy.

The second half of the concert was given over to a performance of *Das Lied von der Erde*, Mahler's last song cycle, which seems to me perfectly poised between the grandeur and pettiness of human existence, between resignation and protest, ecstasy and misery. It accords well with the mood of one whose intimation of impending cultural catastrophe coincides with his own declining vigor: in short, with the mood of someone like me.

There is a lot of pleasure to be had from doom, as Mahler knew, but who can say of Mahler' ...

Theodore Dalrymple is a doctor who works in a British inner city hospital and prison. He has worked in Africa, the Pacific and Latin America. He has published two collections of articles (*If Symptoms Persist*, and *If Symptoms Still Persist*), a novel, *So Little Done: The Testament of a Serial Killer*, and a polemic on the meaning of Health scares, *Mass Listeria*. He writes for *The Spectator* in London and many newspapers. He is contributing editor of the *City Journal*, New York. His articles written for the *City Journal* have been collected in *Life at the Bottom : The Worldview That Makes the Underclass* (Ivan Dee). He has also recently published *The Intelligent Person's Guide to Health and Health Care* (Duckworth, London).

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