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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' ...

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