H.G. Wells was an English author who is known, along with Jules Verne, as the father of science fiction. As a young man Wells was proficient in Latin and was an avid reader of Plato’s *Republic* and Thomas More’s *Utopia*. He received a Bachelor of Science degree in 1890. Earning his early living as a teacher, he also loved to sketch contributed spirited drawings to his own novels. Wells wrote many works but is remembered best for his classic novels of science fiction, including *The War of the Worlds*, *The Invisible Man*, and *The Time Machine*, which was published in 1895, ten years before Einstein published the Special Theory of Relativity. Wells’s novels inspired Robert Goddard, the rocket scientist.
There was a breath of wind, and the lamp flame jumped. One of the candles on the mantel was blown out, and the little machine suddenly swung round...

The astonishment of the model Time Machine’s behavior is intensified by Wells’s control of the meter of the lines. Wells uses stressed syllables to capture the action, with three stressed syllables in a row for lamp flame jumped, and then double-stresses, called spondees, to capture the candle being blown out and the machine being swung round. These stand out of the matrix of more typical rhythms. Below, the speed of the event is captured in anapests:

as a GHOST / for a SEC / ond per HAPS

Notice the near-rhyme of candle and mantel.
and disappear. Have a good look at the thing. Look at
the table too, and satisfy yourselves there is no trickery.
I don’t want to waste this model, and then be told I’m a
quack.”

There was a minute’s pause perhaps. The Psychologist
seemed about to speak to me, but changed his mind.
Then the Time Traveller put forth his finger towards
the lever. “No,” he said suddenly. “Lend me your hand.”
And turning to the Psychologist, he took that individual’s
hand in his own and told him to put out his forefinger.
So that it was the Psychologist himself who sent forth the
model Time Machine on its interminable voyage. We all
saw the lever turn. I am absolutely certain there was no
trickery. There was a breath of wind, and the lamp flame
jumped. One of the candles on the mantel was blown out,
and the little machine suddenly swung round, became
indistinct, was seen as a ghost for a second perhaps, as
an eddy of faintly glittering brass and ivory; and it was
gone—vanished! Save for the lamp the table was bare.

Every one was silent for a minute. Then Filby said he
was damned.

The Psychologist recovered from his stupor, and
suddenly looked under the table. At that the Time

**quack**: n. fraud
**eddy**: n. a swirl
**stupor**: n. near-consciousness

**interminable**: adj. without end
**save**: prep. except

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mankind before it settled down into perfect harmony with the conditions under which it lived—the flourish of that triumph which began the last great peace. This has ever been the fate of energy in security; it takes to art and to eroticism, and then come languor and decay.

“Even this artistic impetus would at last die away—had almost died in the Time I saw. To adorn themselves with flowers, to dance, to sing in the sunlight; so much was left of the artistic spirit, and no more. Even that would fade in the end into a contented inactivity. We are kept keen on the grindstone of pain and necessity, and, it seemed to me, that here was that hateful grindstone broken at last!

“As I stood there in the gathering dark I thought that in this simple explanation I had mastered the problem of the world—mastered the whole secret of these delicious people. Possibly the checks they had devised for the increase of population had succeeded too well, and their numbers had rather diminished than kept stationary. That would account for the abandoned ruins. Very simple was my explanation, and plausible enough—as most wrong theories are!

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**languor**: n. tiredness, weariness, inertia

**impetus**: n. energy, force

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Afterwards I found I had got only a half-truth—or only a glimpse of one facet of the truth. (p. 67)

As I stood there in the gathering dark I thought that in this simple explanation I had mastered the problem of the world...
Very simple was my explanation, and plausible enough—as most wrong theories are! (p. 68)

Socrates said he knew that he knew nothing. Epistemology is that branch of philosophy that examines the nature and limitation of knowledge, with particular attention to the problem of how we know—if in fact we do—what we know. The Time Traveller, for all of his intellectual gifts, struggles with his own mind; he bases his first, hasty, overconfident conclusions on an inadequate acquaintance with the facts. As he notes, false theories, though specious, can be overwhelmingly plausible—seemingly probable. His search takes place under the smiling gaze of the sphinx, the mythical proposer of riddles.
Feeling tired—my feet, in particular, were very sore—I carefully lowered Weena from my shoulder as I halted, and sat down upon the turf. I could no longer see the Palace of Green Porcelain, and I was in doubt of my direction. I looked into the thickness of the wood and thought of what it might hide. Under that dense tangle of branches one would be out of sight of the stars. Even were there no other lurking danger—a danger I did not care to let my imagination loose upon—there would still be all the roots to stumble over and the tree-boles to strike against.

Like other classic writers, Wells shifts rhythm for emphasis, stressing syllables to stress thoughts. Here we see seven iambic feet ending in a trochee that emphasizes might hide. Notice that might and hide are near rhyme, adding further emphasis to the idea of hiding.

“I was very tired, too, after the excitement of the

boles: n. trunk

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