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Time Travel:

E. A. Poe, Charles Dickens, Mark Twain

***The Unparalleled Adventure of One Hans Phall, A Christmas Carol,
and The Diaries of Adam and Eve***

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Abstract: For centuries, time travelling was defined only as a mind adventure and a way to create stories and tales. Philosophers reflected on the theme of time and its irregularities. In Physics, Sir Isaac Newton developed his theory about time stating that it is measurable, constant, and straight.

For the natural days are truly unequal, though they are commonly considered as equal, and used for a measure of time; astronomers correct this inequality for their more accurate deducing of the celestial motions [...] time may be accurately measured. (Newton, 1846: 78)

Keywords: time travel; mind adventure; stories and tales; future and past; pendulum of history; human complexity.

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1. Introduction

The concept of time is restricted, but with Einstein's theory of relativity the concept of straight and constant transforms into the concept of flexible and malleable. If Newton presents time as independent from space, Einstein does the other way around. Through Thomas Kuhn's ideas about time travel, a new paradigm is created: the basic laws of science are destroyed and a change in understanding of the universe is created. These paradigm shifts highlight the development of science. When exploring the theme of time travel we must consider introducing the idea of science fiction which started with Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*.

[...] the origin of SF. Of course, it is in a way a Stone Age truth to say that SF began with Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*(1818) [...] is more a merely convenient place at which to begin the story. (Aldiss, 1986:18)

With Edgar Allan Poe, Science Fiction was on the Rise. Hans Phall (*The Unparalleled Adventure of One Hans Phall*) leaves a letter to the astronomers of the city of Rotterdam stating his adventure on the moon. The displacement of time is revealed from the beginning. He suspends time and travels into space. Disappearing and reappearing may feel longer than the actual time expressed. The beginning is interpreted as a future letter by this communication through past-present-future.

It is well known to most of my fellow-citizens that for the period of forty years I continued to occupy the little square brick building at the head of the alley called Sauerkraut, in which I resided at the time of my disappearance. My ancestors have also resided therein time out of mind. (Poe, 1902:57)

2. Time and Evolution: From Solitude to Human Complexity

In *The Diaries of Adam and Eve* time has a dual form, a journey of development of evolving and, most importantly, a way of creating and understanding the time pattern. Time is not deconstructed or modified, but established. The relationship is based on time and evolution. Adam has a childish perspective, at first, and living in solitude, the events from his environment will influence his discoveries. Through Eve's interaction he will gain the complexity of a human being and he will face progression. If Hans Pfahl dives into the future and past, holding on the moment, Adam has to observe the environment is changing:

About an hour after sun-up [...] thousands of animals [...] broke into a tempest of frightful noises, and in one moment the plain was a frantic commotion and every beast was destroying its neighbour. I knew what it meant – Eve had eaten that fruit, and death was come into the world. (Twain, 2018:9)

Adam's perception of time is linear, progressing steadily and consistently as he moves through life, with events developing in a straightforward and sequential

manner. In contrast, Hans Pfall's experience of time is nonlinear and disoriented, bending and warping in ways that defy conventional understanding. The distances in time are irregular, creating a sense of distortion and fluidity. In *A Christmas Carol*, the concept of time takes on a symbolic and transformative role, embodied through the supernatural intervention of spirits. Ebenezer Scrooge, a miserly and hardened man, is transported across different periods of time—his past, present, and potential future—with the guidance of three distinct ghosts. Each spirit serves as a metaphor for the consequences of his choices and behaviors. The Ghost of Christmas Past revisits poignant moments of his childhood and youth, illuminating how his past experiences shaped his current demeanor. The Ghost of Christmas Present reveals the joy and hardships of those around him, showing the immediate impact of his actions. Finally, the Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come presents a haunting vision of his future, warning him of the dire consequences if he fails to change his ways.

Together, these differing representations of time—linear, nonlinear, and metaphorical—highlight the complexity of how time shapes human experiences and perspectives in distinct narratives.

Scrooge closed the window, and examined the door by which the Ghost had entered. [...] the dull conversation of the Ghost [...] went straight to bed, without undressing, and fell asleep upon the instant. (Dickens, 2007:34)

The shifts in time throughout these narratives emphasize the profound impact that even small changes in the past can have on the present and future. This interconnectedness highlights the delicate balance between actions and consequences across time. For Ebenezer Scrooge in *A Christmas Carol*, these shifts serve as a catalyst for his internal transformation. His journey is cyclic and structured, designed as a moral framework through which he seeks redemption and renewal. This process is methodical, guided by a supernatural force that enables him to reflect deeply on his life. The spirits—representing the Past, Present, and Future—help him explore his identity and understand the significance of his choices, ultimately leading him to embrace compassion and generosity.

In contrast, the experiences of Adam and Hans Pfall are solitary and introspective, emphasizing their individual struggles with time. Adam is compelled to seek glimpses of time on his own, unraveling its mysteries through a personal and linear journey. Hans Pfall, on the other hand, encounters time in a suspended and distorted state, where its traditional boundaries blur. Unlike Scrooge, who is guided by external forces, both Adam and Hans Pfall must navigate their experiences independently, confronting the nature of time and its implications without the aid of supernatural guidance.

Together, these narratives explore the varied relationships between individuals and time, showcasing how it can serve as a tool for redemption, a source of solitude, or a force to be manipulated and suspended. Each protagonist's journey reflects their unique circumstances and the ways in which time shapes their paths toward self-discovery and transformation.

In the Ebbinghaus illusion the same stimulus (the two central circles, which have the same size) produces two different sensations which are correlated with the surrounding elements. [...] Perception is correlative: the elements of perception are like captured in a cognitive grid of determinant mutual influences, one element influencing and being influenced by all the others. (MA, 2021:494)

3. From Innocence to Understanding

The chain of past-present-future is constant in *A Christmas Carol* and *The Diaries of Adam and Eve*, but in E. A. Poe's work the elements of time progression are reconstructed. Hans's escape from the Earth to the Moon, to an unfamiliar territory, a movement to an unknown boundary and the highlight is upon what device, the material, he is using: a balloon.

It appeared to be yes! it was undoubtedly a species of balloon; but surely no such balloon had ever been seen in Rotterdam before. For who, let me ask, ever heard of a balloon manufactured entirely of dirty newspapers? (Poe, 1902:52)

This device is imbued with characteristics that enable travel into the vastness of space, intricately described with a scientific lens to ground the extraordinary concept in plausible terms. The meticulous construction of the balloon reflects not only the protagonist's ingenuity but also his profound longing to escape the confines of reality. It symbolizes his yearning for freedom, a break from the mundane and restrictive nature of earthly existence.

The balloon serves as more than a vehicle for physical transportation; it becomes a metaphor for transcending the limitations of the present. By breaking the boundaries of time and space, it allows the protagonist to venture into uncharted realms, exploring possibilities that extend beyond the ordinary dimensions of human experience. This journey becomes an exploration of both the external universe and the inner workings of the mind, where the pursuit of discovery and the need for escape intertwine.

With a touch of irony, the balloon—while a marvel of scientific and imaginative achievement—also represents the fragility of human ambition. Its construction and usage highlight a paradox: the desire to reach beyond the stars and the simultaneous acknowledgment of how grounded human limitations remain. Through this device, the narrative delves into themes of aspiration, escapism, and the enduring quest to understand the mysteries of existence.

[...] the balloon is attracted by its gravity and collapses instead of smoothly alighting. (Poe K. A., 2004:62)

He moves fluidly through the realms of the past and present, not merely as an observer but as an active participant seeking to reshape his understanding of time. This journey is driven by his desire to gain access to the future and its potential adventures, challenging and ultimately stretching the conventional patterns of time.

Through this traversal, the protagonist breaks free from the linear constraints of time, venturing into a space where moments from different eras coexist and influence one another. The past becomes a source of wisdom and reflection, offering insights into decisions and actions that have shaped his present. The present serves as a pivotal ground, where choices are made and perspectives are transformed, propelling him toward the uncharted opportunities of the future.

This exploration of time transcends its traditional boundaries, turning it into a malleable construct that can be bent and reshaped according to his experiences and desires. In doing so, the protagonist embarks on a transformative adventure that is not just about reaching the future but about understanding the interconnectedness of all time periods. His journey symbolizes the human aspiration to grasp the unknown, redefine possibilities, and create meaning across the continuum of time.

I proceeded to procure, at intervals, cambric muslin, very fine, hi pieces of twelve yards each; twine; a lot of varnish of caoutchouc; a large and deep basket of wickerwork, made to order; and several other articles necessary in the construction and equipment of a balloon of extraordinary dimensions. (Poe, 1902:61)

On the one hand, Scrooge desperately needs a different temporal dimension to gain himself and his redemption. The past is his *illo tempore*. It holds the existential origins of the character and his identity. Even if the narrative is linear, it seems to be that he has to become aware of the impact of the future.

[...] it is the time that was created and sanctified by the gods [...] of which the festival is precisely a reactualization. [...] the participants [...] meet in it the first appearance of sacred time, as it appeared ab origine, in *illo tempore*. (Eliade, 1957:69-70)

Scrooge's unanswered obstacles form his personality. His past is sacred. His tangible present is between poverty and happiness and his future is dependent on the present, the repercussions that he will explore. Time is the agent of responsibility and it mirrors the power of change. The shift of time travel and the different realms appear in sleep as in Dante Alighieri's *Inferno*.

He was conscious of being exhausted, and overcome by an irresistible drowsiness [...] and had barely time to reel to bed, before he sank into a heavy sleep. (Dickens, 2007:66)

On the other hand, the Garden of Eden of Adam and Eve is the backdrop for their development. They need to seek for surroundings to discover themselves and others. If the crafty Hans Pfall creates methods to bend time, the Garden of Eden seems to be aiding in developing the idea of moments.

But I shall go over, mornings, breakfast, and see if it has more teeth. If it gets a mouthful of teeth it will be time for it to go, tail or no tail, for a bear does not need a tail in order to be dangerous. (Twain, 2018:13-14)

Eve's perception of time is naïve and childish, but as she discovers/learns the patterns of time (the moon, stars, phases of day and night) she observes the changes that repeat. Her relationship with Adam influences the patterns because he is becoming her existence:

I had created something that didn't exist before; I had added a new thing to the world's uncountable properties [...] and was going to run and find him and tell him about it. (Twain, 2018:23)

One small event influences the other. Cause and effect dichotomy. The small event in the Universe will create a reaction at any cost. Hans Pfall is driven to escape from debt by building a balloon so he will travel and land on the Moon which reveals a possible future for humanity, Adam and Eve are banished from the Garden of Eden because of eating the forbidden fruit and Scrooge's wealth and egocentrism can influence his fate.

Small initial variations leading to great changes: "branching" effect (with amplification of causes). (MA, 2021:404)

Only Ebenezer Scrooge is granted the extraordinary ability to see into his own future and, more importantly, to alter its course. This rare gift of foresight is coupled with the power of self-reflection, allowing him to critically analyze his life and understand the pivotal changes he must make to preserve his true identity. Through this introspective journey, Scrooge comes to recognize the consequences of his actions and the urgency of transforming his ways to avoid a grim and lonely fate. Central to Scrooge's transformation is his realization that his lack of compassion and empathy has eroded the relationships he once held with others. His obsession with wealth and disregard for human connection have left him isolated, embittered, and unloved. This emotional void is starkly contrasted by the joy, warmth, and generosity displayed by those around him, particularly during the festive season.

Scrooge confronts the haunting vision of a future defined by solitude and regret, he begins to understand that redemption lies in rebuilding these fractured relationships. The ghosts of Christmas Past, Present, and Future serve as guides, showing him the profound impact his attitudes and actions have had on those around him. By embracing compassion, kindness, and selflessness, Scrooge not only saves his identity but also reclaims his humanity, rediscovering the importance of community, love, and the shared spirit of generosity.

Spirit! [...] Hear me! I am not the man I was. I will not be the man I must have been but for this intercourse. [...] Scrooge was better than his word. He did it all, and indefinitely more. (Dickens, 2007:135-148)

Adam and Eve are damned to be sinners in order to create the (Fall) World. Their time is correlated with disobedience and influences the entire humanity. Salvation can happen in the future but with the help of Divinity. Innocence is condemned to be the ultimate exile. The repercussions are long-lasting and not short terms as in *The Unparalleled Adventure of One Hans Pfaall* or *A Christmas Carol*.

This prayer is also important, and will not cease from being offered up while my race continues. I am the first wife; and in the last wife I shall be repeated. (Twain, 2018:31)

4. Conclusion

To sum up, *The Unparalleled Adventure of One Hans Pfaall*, *A Christmas Carol*, and *The Diaries of Adam and Eve* collectively evoke, through the motif of time travel, a rich tapestry of themes that explore the complexity of human experience. These works offer multiple perspectives on humanity, delving into the transformations that shape individuals and societies, the far-reaching consequences of actions from both the past and the future, and the enduring struggles of the human condition burdened by sin.

Each narrative captures the quest for knowledge and existence in its unique way. Hans Pfaall's adventure speaks to humanity's boundless curiosity and the desire to escape and transcend earthly limitations, while Adam and Eve's diaries reflect the innocence, discovery, and ultimate fall that define human origins. In contrast, *A Christmas Carol* presents a deeply moral exploration of redemption and the transformative power of self-awareness and compassion, emphasizing the need to confront and amend past mistakes to shape a better future.

These stories also highlight the timeless journey of the human mind as it seeks meaning, understanding, and purpose. They emphasize the unseen forces—whether supernatural, existential, or self-imposed—that influence and structure our destiny. Together, they serve as a profound reminder of the

interconnectedness of time, the cyclical nature of personal and collective growth, and the enduring resilience of the human spirit in navigating the complexities of existence.

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