The Door in the Wall Study Guide

The Door in the Wall by H. G. Wells

The following sections of this BookRags Literature Study Guide is offprint from Gale's For Students Series: Presenting Analysis, Context, and Criticism on Commonly Studied Works: Introduction, Author Biography, Plot Summary, Characters, Themes, Style, Historical Context, Critical Overview, Criticism and Critical Essays, Media Adaptations, Topics for Further Study, Compare & Contrast, What Do I Read Next?, For Further Study, and Sources.

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Encyclopedia of Popular Fiction: "Social Concerns", "Thematic Overview", "Techniques", "Literary Precedents", "Key Questions", "Related Titles", "Adaptations", "Related Web Sites".

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults: "About the Author", "Overview", "Setting", "Literary Qualities", "Social Sensitivity", "Topics for Discussion", "Ideas for Reports and Papers".

BOOKRAGS

Contents

The Door in the Wall Study Guide....1

Contents....2

Introduction....4

Author Biography....5

Plot Summary....6

Part 1....7

Part 2....9

Part 3....10

Part 4....11

Characters....12

Themes....13

Style....15

Historical Context....17

Critical Overview....19

Criticism....20

Critical Essay #1....21

Critical Essay #2....24

Critical Essay #3....27

Critical Essay #4....29

Critical Essay #5....30

Critical Essay #6....33

Topics for Further Study....35

Compare and Contrast....36

What Do I Read Next?....37

Further Study....38

Copyright Information.....39

Introduction

H. G. Wells's short story "The Door in the Wall" was first published in 1911 as part of a collection titled *The Door in the Wall, and Other Stories*. The conflict between science and imagination is the major theme of the story, which was enormously popular when it first appeared. Today Wells's reputation rests almost entirely upon his science fiction novels, which include *The Time Machine* (1895), *The Island of Dr. Moreau* (1896), *The Invisible Man* (1897), and *The War of the Worlds* (1898), all of which are acknowledged classics of the science fiction genre and continue to be widely read and adapted into other media. "The Door in the Wall" is considered by both readers and critics to be Wells's finest short story.

"The Door in the Wall" examines an issue to which Wells returned repeatedly in his writing- the contrast between aesthetics and science and the difficulty of choosing between them. The protagonist, Lionel Wallace, possesses a vivid imagination but goes into politics, where he is considered extremely rational. Wells himself was both a trained scientist and a writer of fiction, and this theme recurs in several guises in Wells's work The story suggests both the magic and the danger of a nostalgia for a buried time. It is a story about politician Wallace who, while growing up in a joyless home, discovers a door in a wall leading to an enchanted garden. Wells's recurrent theme of science versus art is part of a wider contrast between the rational and the imaginative elements of experience. Wells has often been seen as being caught on an intellectual battleground between his scientific training in rational thought and his gift of a vivid imagination. Wallace's inability to bridge the gap between his imagination and his rational, scientific side leads to his death.

Author Biography

H. G. Wells was a scientific visionary and social prophet. One of the most widely read British writers of his generation, he explored the new territory of science fiction and crusaded for a new social order in more than forty-four novels and social and historical books.

Herbert George Wells was born into a poor family in Bromley, Kent, a suburb of London, on September 21, 1866. He sought to escape poverty by receiving an education at London University and the Royal College of Science, where he studied zoology. One of his professors, the noted biologist T. H. Huxley, instilled in Wells the belief in social and biological evolution that Wells later cited as the single most influential aspect of his education. After graduating, Wells wrote a biology textbook and began submitting fiction to various magazines, determined to fulfill his dream of being an author. His childhood fascination with science, coupled with Ms science education, found expression in *The Time Machine*, the first of several enormously popular novels of scientific mythmaking, which was followed by *The Island of Dr. Moreau*, *The Invisible Man*, *The War of the Worlds*, and *The First Men in the Moon*.

Fame brought Wells an invitation to join the socialist Fabian Society, an alliance that later turned sour despite Wells' s great enthusiasm for the socialist cause. In his personal life, he sought the ideal woman, one who would combine passion and intellect, and this led to a stormy ten-year love affair with the young English author Rebecca West. (Their union resulted in a son, Anthony West, who grew up to become a distinguished writer himself.) Wells's ambivalence about the benefits of science and technology contained in his earlier novels increasingly gave way to a sense of himself as a social architect and cautionary prophet. Throughout the 1930s he took center stage in warning that humankind was on the brink of disaster, while zealously planning the reconstruction of society. Throughout this time his fiction took on an instructional tone, reflecting the author's increasingly bitterness about humanity and its prospects for perfectibility. Wells died in 1946 at the age of eighty.

Plot Summary

Confiding to his friend Redmond who narrates "The Door in the Wall," Lionel Wallace relates that a preoccupation is gradually coming to dominate his life, one that is even affecting his career as a successful politician. Long ago as a lonely child of five he had wandered out of his home into the streets of West Kensington in London, where he noticed a green door set in a white wall. It was very attractive to him, and he wanted to open it, but at the same time he felt that his father would be very angry if he did. Wallace's father is described as "a stem preoccupied lawyer, who gave him little attention and expected great things of him." Wallace's mother was dead, and he was being raised by a governess. Nevertheless, the young Wallace gives in to the temptation and finds himself in an enchanted garden Wallace describes the garden as a children's paradise with an inspiring atmosphere. The garden's colors are clean and bright, and the child is filled with happiness. There are various animals, including two tame panthers, beautiful flowers, and shady trees. Wallace meets a tall, fan: girl who "came to meet me, smiling, and said 'Well9' to me, and lifted me and kissed me, and put me down and led me by the hand." He meets other children and they play games together, although he cannot remember the games, a fact which later causes him much distress.

A woman begins to read a book to the boy, and soon it becomes apparent that the story she is telling is that of his own life. When the book reaches the point in his life at which Wallace finds himself outside the green door, the enchanted world vanishes, and the boy finds himself once more on the dismal West Kensington street in London.

Wallace tells his father about the garden—and is punished for telling what his father assumes is a lie. In time, and as a result of this punishment, Wallace succeeds in suppressing the memory. But he can never quite forget it completely and often dreams of revisiting the garden. Throughout his life he unexpectedly comes upon the door in the wall in different parts of London, but each time he is rushing to an important commitment of one sort or another and does not stop to open it.

Wallace tells his friend Redmond that three times in the past year he has seen the door, and on each occasion he has passed it by: once because he was on his way to a vital division in the House of Commons; once, significantly, because he was hurrying to his father's deathbed and once because he wished, for reasons of personal ambition, to continue a discussion with a colleague. Now his soul "is full of unappeasable regrets," and he is barely capable of working. One morning a few months later, Wallace is found dead, having apparently mistaken a door at a dangerous construction sight for the elusive door in the wall.

Part 1

Part 1 Summary

The Door in the Wall begins with the narrator, Redmond, recalling a story that his friend Lionel Wallace had once told him. The story had been told in such a way that he had no choice but to believe it at the time, with the atmosphere of a long dinner, drinks, and intimate lighting adding to its believability. However, once Redmond had woken up the next morning, he was no longer sure of the story's accuracy. After further reflection, he decided that whether or not the story was actually true, Wallace had honestly believed that it was. Redmond also reveals that Lionel Wallace is dead.

At this point, the story flashes back to Lionel Wallace's confession to Redmond. Wallace begins by telling Redmond that he feels that certain things are missing from his life. He is filled, at times, with such an intense longing that the everyday occurrences of life do not interest him. Redmond reflects on this, recalling a photograph of Wallace in which the latter wears an apathetic expression. He also remembers a woman who had loved Wallace saying that in an instant, interest and life could remove themselves from him. It was not always like that; Wallace had excelled, both at school, which he had attended with Redmond, and throughout his career. Wallace was only 39 years old as he was telling this story over dinner, and he had a bright career ahead of him.

Redmond explains that Wallace had first told him of the door in the wall in school and then told him again a month before he died. Wallace had believed that the door in the wall was a "real door leading through a real wall to immortal realities." The door had first appeared to Wallace when he was five years old. He had been a very bright child, who was given the freedom usually reserved for older children. His mother had died during his birth, leaving him to be raised by a lenient governess and an absent, though demanding father. He had first seen the door in the wall while wandering down the West Kensington roads. Suddenly, there it stood: a green door in a white wall. He had wanted to open the door but felt that it would be wrong to do so, so he had walked past it, pretending to examine the wares of a neighboring storefront. He changed his mind at once, though, and ran to the door, opened it, stepped through, and closed it behind him. Beyond the door, Wallace found himself in the garden that he would never forget.

Wallace had tried to accurately explain the garden to Redmond. Once he stepped into the garden, he said, he was suddenly filled with a sense of happiness and calm, as if everything was right with the world. He thought perhaps it was something in the air. Everything was more beautiful in the garden, which stretched out farther then the eye could see, fading off into hills in the distance. Even more remarkably, he told Redmond, there were two large, spotted panthers playing with a ball in a small clearing edged with flowers. The young Wallace was not afraid of the large animals, and one panther had even come up to him and rubbed his furry head against Wallace's outstretched hand.

A girl had then appeared in the garden and come to him. She kissed and hugged Wallace before leading him through the garden, asking him questions in a quiet voice. Wallace could never remember the questions and answers, only the feeling of well-being he had when he was with her. A monkey came down from the trees and settled himself on Wallace's shoulder as they continued making their way through the garden.

Wallace recalls that the garden held many people, all with love and joy in their eyes. There were white doves, he says, and beautiful fountains. There, in the garden, he met friends, which were sorely missing in his solitary life. Just as he was playing a game he could never remember with his new friends, a gentle but grave woman dressed in a deep purple robe came and took him away from the group; she led Wallace to her gallery, where she sat beside him and opened the book that was in her lap. Within the pages of the book, Wallace saw the story of his life, told not merely with pictures but with moving images. Wallace had skipped through the book until he found an image of himself at the green door, trying to decide whether or not to open it. It was then that the woman stopped Wallace from turning the page.

Wallace had asked the women what came next, and she had finally allowed him to turn the page. There, Wallace saw himself on the streets of West Kensington; he was sobbing, because he wanted to go back to the garden and continue playing with his new friends. Then suddenly, the image was not just a page in the women's book, but reality. Wallace was once again out on the lonely streets. As a young boy sobbing on the streets of London, he soon drew a crowd, so he left for home to escape it. There was much questioning from his governess and father, neither of whom believed his story.

The tale Wallace tells Redmond was the entirety of what Wallace could remember of the garden. He is never sure whether it was reality or only some intensely vivid daydream that he cannot shake, but he cried and dreamed often of the garden, he said. He never looked for it again, though, until several years had passed. He said that there was even a period of time during which he did not think of it at all.

Part 1 Analysis

Part 1 of *The Door in the Wall* presents some important background information. The reader learns Wallace's age when he discovered the garden, the area in which he had lived at the time, and the fact that he is now dead. Wallace, is set up as a lonely boy who had one unbelievable experience concerning a secret garden. The fact that he was a lonely child without many friends makes it more believable that he has made up the story concerning the door in the wall.

Part 2

Part 2 Summary

Wallace continues by explaining a game he used to play by himself called North-West Passage. He would leave his house ten minutes early, wander in an odd direction, and try to find a new way to get to school. One day, he explains, he was getting quite lost, and it seemed as though he would lose the private game. Suddenly, he had encountered a secret passage at the end of a cul de sac. It led to a familiar looking area where, once again, there stood the long white wall and green door. The only difference this time was that he did not think of going through it, as he didn't want to be late for school. He did made it to school on time that day and thought of the garden as a jolly place that would always be there when he had the time to explore it.

Wallace tells Redmond that he told one of his classmates about the garden the next day. As he was telling the other boy, he felt ashamed, as if he were sharing a secret when he should not. The day after that, a number of larger boys teased him and called him a liar. He rebutted their accusations by telling them that he could take them all to the garden, and he proceeded to lead the six mocking boys in the direction of the white wall and green door; he could not find it again. He tried to find it later when he was alone and throughout the rest of his boyhood but always came up empty handed.

Part 2 Analysis

In Part 2, the adolescent Wallace is described in very different terms from those used to describe the adult Wallace who tells Redmond the story. As an adolescent, Wallace is much more concerned with his life, career, school, and future than with the opportunity that the green door might represent. He sees promise in his future and is excited by all life has to offer. He changes eventually, for in Part 1 the adult Wallace is described as someone for whom the everyday occurrences in life hold no interest, and he is sometimes known to suddenly lose interest in his surroundings. It is insinuated that at those times, he is lost in thought about the green door and the garden beyond. Whenever he did search for the door, though, he came up empty handed.

Part 3

Part 3 Summary

The next time Wallace saw the door he was seventeen and in the back of a hansom cab on his way to Oxford. He was hoping to win a scholarship and knew it was important that he not be late; he decided not to stop. He did win the scholarship and had been glad he had had the restraint not to stop and enter the garden.

He reminisces that in those times, the real world afforded more excitement and opportunity than he believed he could find in the garden. He had his career, and he did well in it. At this point, the narrator lets the reader know that Wallace is a cabinet minister. Only recently had he come to feel that his work and life had become repetitive; he began to long for the garden, telling himself that if he ever saw the door again, he would not miss the opportunity to enter. Yet in the past year, he tells Redmond, he *had* come across the green door and chosen not to stop, always being too busy.

As Wallace tells the story to Redmond, he says that he firmly believes that the door is gone; he has missed his numerous chances to rediscover the garden. He confesses that for the past two months he has done hardly any work, instead waiting for nightfall to come so that he can wander the street searching for the white wall and green door.

Part 3 Analysis

During Part 3 of the story, Wallace expresses his deep regret that he never stopped and entered the green door when he happened upon it. He was always in too much of a hurry; he always had urgent appointments to keep. Whenever he searched for the door, he could never find it, and it was ironic that he could only see it when he didn't have the time to enter. At the end of his life, Wallace became obsessed with finding the elusive green door once again.

Part 4

Part 4 Summary

Redmond contemplates Wallace's story and his fate and glances at the newspaper containing his death notice before he explains the circumstances surrounding his demise. Wallace's body had been found in a construction site near the East Kensington Station. An extension of the railway was being built there, and there was a very deep hole in the ground. A blockade had been secured around it with a doorway for the convenience of the workmen. The door had accidentally been left unlocked.

Redmond wonders if a trick of light had made it appear that the blockade was a white wall and the door his green door leading to the garden. Or perhaps there was no real garden, door, or wall after all. Perhaps the entire story was just an illusion or figment of Wallace's imagination. Maybe the belief in the door in the wall offered Wallace an escape into a gentler world away from his obligations, even if it betrayed him in the end. Then, Redmond thinks, perhaps it didn't betray him after all.

Part 4 Analysis

Redmond finishes his recollection of Wallace's story in the final part of narrative. He wonders if perhaps Wallace was the victim of his own illusion. On the other hand, it is possible that Wallace had found the solace that he had been searching for all along. Death may have offered the peace and escape that the garden represented.

Characters

Redmond

Redmond, the narrator of "The Door in the Wall," meets his old friend Wallace for a dinner one night. Wallace tells Redmond the story of the door in the wall. At first. Redmond does not know if he should or should not believe his friend's wild tale: "But whether he himself saw, or only thought he saw, whether he himself was the possessor of an inestimable privilege, or the victim of a fantastic dream, I cannot pretend to guess." This unwillingness to judge his friend displays his sense of sympathy. Redmond represents the voice of reason, making Wallace's story more believable because it is told by what readers assume is a reliable narrator. Furthermore, because Redmond is relating the tale, readers also learn of Wallace's strange death, which seems to verify the tale Wallace tells him at dinner. Redmond's account of the story also lends it a tragic tone because it is related after Wallace's death—a feat not possible if Wallace himself was the narrator.

Lionel Wallace

Politician Lionel Wallace is the protagonist of "The Door in the Wall." As a child living in a joyless home, he discovers a door to a visionary garden of happiness. His cautious nature is shown by his trepidation upon encountering the door, because he knows his father will be angry if he opens it. A child of a strict, Victorian upbringing, Wallace has been conditioned to deny his imagination and put all his effort into becoming successful. Nevertheless, the young Wallace gives in to the temptation—not yet having mastered self-control—and opens the door in the wall, and finds himself in an enchanted garden rilled with beautiful flowers, tamed panthers, and friendly children. When Wallace tells his father about the garden, his father punishes him for lying, causing Wallace to suppress the memory of the garden.

Throughout his life. Wallace sees a similar door a few times, but he is too driven by his ambition for worldly success to stop and open it. Now, at age 39 and very successful, Wallace regrets passing up the garden and vows to stop the next time he sees the door. This regret illustrates his desire to give in to imagination and to break free from his rational life. Wallace's inability to distinguish between reality and fantasy, however, is demonstrated at the story's end when he is found dead at a construction site, having apparently mistaken a workmen's door for the door to his garden.

Themes

Alienation and Loneliness

Whether Wallace's fantastic tale about the garden is true is of less significance than the fact that it is a metaphor for his alienation and loneliness. Wallace's mother died when he was born, and his father was stern and expected great things of him. The treatment Wallace received as a child forced him to retreat into a private world of imagination. The only place where he could find love and attention was through the door in the wall. Wallace was forced as a child to repress his imagination: "I tried to tell them, and my father gave me my first thrashing for telling lies. When afterwards I tried to tell my aunt, she punished me again for my wicked persistence. Then ... everyone was forbidden to listen to me, to hear a word about it." B ecause he had to retreat into a private world just so he could use his imagination, alienation and loneliness became familiar feelings for Wallace. These feelings persist throughout his life and make it difficult for him to connect with other people.

Sanity and Insanity

At first, Redmond does not know if he should believe his friend's wild tale. "But whether he himself saw, or only thought he saw, whether he himself was the possessor of an inestimable privilege, or the victim of a fantastic dream, I cannot pretend to guess." The reader is more willing to believe Wallace's fantastic story because it is filtered through the sensible, "sane" voice of the narrator. Redmond fits the preconceived notion of a sane person in that he seems to have a normal, healthy mind, makes sound, rational judgments, and shows good sense. Wallace seems just as sane at first; he does not fit the stereotype of an insane person because he holds a prestigious job and seems successful. Wells's intention was not to develop an insane character but to show the consequences of having to separate the various components of one's personality. As a child, Wallace is forced to suppress his imagination, and he carries this into adulthood. He has been made to think that imagination is a terrible thing. Therefore, Wallace begins to view his childhood experience not as imaginary but as real, and this is the only way Wallace can accept this part of himself. In a Freudian interpretation, he no longer has the ability to differentiate between real and imaginary, since the imaginary is off limits to him. In the end, it may seem that Wallace has gone insane—mistaking a door at a railway construction site for the magical door in the wall—but he is merely trying to return to that brief time in the garden when he was allowed to be himself.

Public vs. Private Life

In his public life, Wallace is an extremely successful Cabinet Minister in the British government. He is trusted and respected. Redmond, the narrator, holds Wallace in the highest esteem. The morning after Wallace tells Redmond the fantastic story, Redmond

says, "I lay in bed and recalled the things he had told me, stripped of the glamour of his earnest slow voice, denuded of the focused shaded table light, the shadowy atmosphere that wrapped about him." Because Wallace is a politician, he is skillful at speaking and presenting himself, which is why Redmond believes him. It is not until Redmond is alone that he begins to question the tale. In private, Wallace is not so competent; he longs for the enchanted garden, that special place behind the wall that he has never known in his public life. His father has raised him to be rational and dull, cold and interested only in his career. Redmond says "what a woman once said of him—a woman who had loved him greatly. 'Suddenly,' she said, 'the interest goes out of him. He forgets you. He doesn't care a rap for you—under his very nose.'" Wallace, like many people raised in such repressive environments as Victorian England, is unable to unite his public and private selves into one balanced person.

Science and Technology

"The Door in the Wall" poses an issue which Wells returned to repeatedly in his writing: the conflict between aesthetics and science. Wells himself was both a scientist and a writer of fiction; similarly, Wallace possesses a vivid imagination but goes into politics, where he is considered extremely rational. This theme recurs in Wells's work and is part of a wider contrast between tangible and imaginative elements of experience. Wells has often been considered a participant in the debate between the virtues of science and the necessity of imagination. Wallace's inability to bridge the gap between his imagination and his rational, scientific side leads to his death.

Style

Point of View

"The Door in the Wall" is told from the point of view of Redmond, Wallace's friend. Redmond speaks in the first person ("I") as he relates Wallace's story. At first, Redmond does not know if he should believe his friend's wild tale: "But whether he himself saw, or only thought he saw, whether he himself was the possessor of an inestimable privilege, or the victim of a fantastic dream, I cannot pretend to guess." The reader is more willing to believe Wallace's fantastic story because it is filtered through the sensible, trustworthy voice of Redmond, the narrator. This particular point of view also allows the reader to find out about Wallace's demise, something that would not have been possible if Wallace told the story himself, although it prevents readers from knowing what Wallace's final thoughts were.

Symbols

"The Door in the Wall" relies heavily on symbols. A symbol is something that is used to represent or refer to something else. Many of Wells's symbols are dreamlike and represent masculine and feminine forces: "'There was,' he said, 'a crimson Virginia creeper—all one bright uniform crimson, in a clear amber sunshine against a white wall. That came into the impression somehow ... and there were horse-chestnut leaves upon the clean pavement outside the green door. They were blotched yellow and green, you know, not brown nor dirty, so that they must have been new fallen.'" The white wall is a feminine symbol representing Wallace's desire for nurturing, which he has repressed since the death of his mother. The white wall is contrasted with the "clear amber sunshine," a symbol for the masculine ego—for the dominant and logical as opposed to the passive and emotional. The symbolic colors in this passage reinforce the contrasting masculine/feminine symbols on which so much of the story hinges. The amber sunshine and red creeper (masculine, virile, dominant) is juxtaposed with the whiteness of the wall (moon, feminine). The green door symbolizes fertility; it is the color associated with the Roman and Greek goddesses of love, Venus and Aphrodite. In opening the door and entering the world beyond his father's domain, Wallace passes into the feminine realm of imagination and sympathy. The door itself is a common literary symbol that represents the passageway between the conscious and the unconscious.

Psychologists who study dreams note that leaves are a symbol of happiness. The leaves Wallace describes are "blotched yellow and green," suggesting that his happiness is short-lived. Although Wallace is exceptionally happy inside the garden, he never regains his sense of delight outside of it, and for the remainder of his life he is tormented widi "the haunting memory of a beauty and happiness that filled his heart with insatiable longings, that made all the interests and spectacle of worldly life seem full and tedious and vain to him."

Metaphor

It is irrelevant whether or not Wallace's fantastic tale is true: more importantly, the tale serves as a metaphor for Wallace's alienation and loneliness. Wallace spends his life longing to return to the enchanted garden, where he knew love and the joy that comes with using one's imagination. In his everyday life, these things were frowned upon. Therefore, the story is a metaphor for Wallace's desire to return to an innocent, beautiful time and place.

Fantasy

Fantasy literature is intended to leave the reader in a state of uncertainty as to whether events are due to natural or supernatural forces. This is the case in "The Door in the Wall," in which five-year-old Wallace visits an enchanted garden. He has utmost confidence in his story's truth. His friend Redmond is not so sure. Fantasy literature usually begins in an unremarkable, everyday setting. In Wells's story, the men meet for dinner and conversation. Readers are slowly pulled into the fantastic story. By gradually easing them into it, readers are more apt to believe the fantasy. In "The Door in the Wall," readers are never quite sure if Wallace really did visit the magical garden or if it was purely a fantasy invented by his imagination.

Historical Context

Optimism in the Edwardian Age

Wells is regarded as one of the most prominent champions of the early twentieth-century spirit of British liberal optimism—the belief that scientific advances have made life almost perfect and that there is nothing left to discover. At the Royal College of Science, Wells studied zoology with noted biologist T. H, Huxley, who instilled in the young scientist the belief in social as well as biological evolution that Wells later cited as the single most influential aspect of his education. His works are ranked with those of playwright Bernard Shaw as exemplary of the era's exuberant sense of release from strict Victorian convention and the belief in the escalating benefits of scientific progress.

"The Door in the Wall" was published at a time of great change in England: rapid cultural change had been taking place since the death of Queen Victoria in 1901, Victoria had ruled Great Britain since 1837. and her reign was known for its conservative outlook on sex. politics, and the arts. In the years following Victoria's death, the English people embraced the possibilities of a new, modern era.

The Schism between Art and Science

Great strides in art and science were taking place at the turn of the century. As inventions such as the automobile, the airplane, and motion pictures began to transform everyday life, the unsettling pace of progress began to affect the arts, which questioned the wisdom of such unbridled growth. Wells, who was both an artist and a scientist, however, was excited by both imagination and technology. Some of the scientific advances that sparked Wells's imagination during these years were Orville and Wilbur Wright's first airplane flight in 1903. the discovery of gamma rays by Paul Villard in 1900, Max Planck's proposition of the quantum theory, and the theory of relativity published in 1905 by Albert Einstein.

At the same tune, new ideas about art were gaining popularity. Wells was influenced by these as well. For example, he read *Creative Evolution* (1907), a book by French philosopher Henri Bergson that stressed the importance of change through a creative life force, in opposition to a scientific view of nature. This view stresses intuition as superior to scientific or intellectual perception. Wells was also interested in the visual arts; he saw that the traditional forms and concepts of art were starting to break down dramatically after 1900 as a variety of alternative aesthetic principles, particularly Cubism, began to develop. Cubism began in 1907 with Pablo Picasso's painting *Demoiselles d'Avignon* and attempted to break away from the conventions of perspective that had ruled European art since the Renaissance.

The first decade of the twentieth century saw enormous changes, and Wells reacted to much of it in his writing. It was the conflict between art and science, however, that Wells

primarily explored in his fiction. The contrast between imagination and science and the difficulty of choosing between them is dramatically illustrated in "The Door in the Wall."

Critical Overview

Since its first publication, "The Door in the Wall" has been recognized by critics as one of Wells's most accomplished stories. In 1924, Alfred C. Ward published a short interpretation of the symbolism of the garden in his *Aspects of the Modern Short Story*, paying particular attention to the theme of the deceptive natures of time and happiness. Among other critics, Bernard Bergonzi, in his *The Early H. G. Wells* (1961), has also examined the symbolism of "The Door in the Wall." Such critics as Roslynn D. Haynes and J. R. Hammond have studied the story's themes, focusing on the conflict between science and the imagination, and between reality and the projections of the imagination —noting that the difference between them is often hard to distinguish. Jerome Hamilton Buckley, in an essay in his *The Triumph of Time* (1969), has suggested that the story's ending is open to interpretation by the reader. Because of its ambiguity, "The Door in the Wall" remains a much-examined and widely read short story

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2
- Critical Essay #3
- Critical Essay #4
- Critical Essay #5
- Critical Essay #6

Critical Essay #1

Williams was previously an instructor at Rutgers University and is currently a freelance writer. In the following essay, she offers an overview of the psychoanalytic interpretations of Wells's "The Door in the Wall," suggesting that Wells warns of the dangers of ignoring the value of imagination.

In "The Door in the Wall," H. G. Wells explores what Roslynn D. Haynes has called a characteristically Wellsian concern: the relationship between imagination and reason, or between the aesthetic and the practical. As a boy, Lionel Wallace, now a prominent politician and man of the world, stumbled across a green door in a white wall Entering, even though he felt certain "his father would be very angry," Wallace found a fantastic garden. He sees the green door several more times during his life, but always at times when stopping to enter the garden would mean sacrificing worldly success.

The symbolic garden at the center of this difficult story has been read differently by critics throughout the years. Early in this century, critics such as Alfred C. Ward, writing in *Aspects of the Modem Short Story; English and American*, saw the garden simply as an emblem of "any one of those fine aspirations by which men are moved and from which they are debarred by the fret and wear and tear of the workaday world." In other words, this is a story about the many beautiful dreams we neglect because of our mundane preoccupation with our jobs. Later psychoanalytical critics, such as the Freudian critic Bernard Bergonzi and the Jungian critic J. R. Hammond, read the garden and its imagery and symbolism as part of a complex psychological drama enacted between the conscious and unconscious elements of Wallace's psyche.

Psychoanalytic literary criticism first became popular in the 1940s, and it remains a strong influence on many critics today. Sigmund Freud set forth the basic tenets of what he called psychoanalysis in his *Introduction to Psychoanalysis* in 1920. He continued to expand upon his original ideas until his death in 1939, creating the tenets of what is today known as classical psychoanalytic criticism—a methodology for interpreting literature by seeing it as wish-fulfillment. For a classical Freudian, literature (like dreams, according to Freud) acts as an arena for playing out unconscious (often sexual) wishes that cannot be realized in everyday life because of our social standards. These wishes are often hidden (or sublimated) in the story. For a psychoanalytic critic, then, the story has both its obvious content (what the story seems to be about), and the suppressed, hidden meanings that can be revealed by examining and translating the story's language, imagery, and symbolism.

In his book *The Early H. G. Wells: A Study of the Scientific Romances*, Bergonzi argued that the green door through which Wallace enters the garden is "an obvious womb symbol" and that Wallace's trip to the garden is "a return in fantasy to a prenatal state." Wallace never knew his mother, so the tall fair girl and the somber woman in the garden are, according to Bergonzi, stand-ins for his real mother. Wallace's trip to the garden and his long-cherished wish to return are aspects of a revolt against his father and his father's authority. Bergonzi reads "The Door in the Wall" as a classic Oedipal myth.

Oedipus, a character from Greek mythology, kills his father and marries his mother. Freud coined the phrase "Oedipal complex" to represent what he felt was a unconscious desire in young boys to compete with the father for the mother's affection, and their wish to dispose of their fathers in order to be the sole object of their mothers' attention, like Oedipus. Because these desires are repressed in order for the boys to exist successfully within society, the desires appear instead in literature, dreams, and other acceptable forms. One stumbling block for this interpretation of "The Door in the Wall," however, is that fact that, since his mother is already dead, Wallace cannot be said to be in competition, in any meaningful way, with his father for his mother's love (though it does seem clear that he has an unconscious desire to rebel against his father's wishes). Bergonzi recognizes this, remarking that the "picture is not exclusively Freudian in its implications."

Carl G. Jung, originally a student of Freud's, broke with Freud and developed his own theories of psychology. Jung's work has had as great an impact on literature and anthropology as that of his teacher and mentor. For Jung, the collective unconscious—unconscious elements shared by all humans—contains primordial images and patterns of experience he calls archetypes. Because they are universal, these archetypes appear again and again in literature, religious stories, and mythology—in all cultures and in all times Jung felt that truly great writers are able to tap into the experiences of the collective unconscious and create literature that, by using archetypes, revitalizes us by "integrating" or bringing into balance, different warring aspects of the psyche.

The work of a Jungian critic such as Hammond, then, consists of identifying the archetypal elements in a given work of literature and determining whether (or how) integration occurs. Hammond, in "Lost Orientations" in *H. G. Wells and the Short Story*, reads the garden Wallace enters as a symbol for the unconscious, and argues that the door is a "familiar psychological metaphor for the threshold between conscious and unconscious." Wallace's conflict is between the masculine, rational world represented by his father and his career and the feminine, imaginative realm represented by the garden; but it is also a conflict between the two sides of his psyche—the masculine persona and the feminine anima, a Jungian term that represents the unconscious feminine aspect of any given man. To achieve psychic wholeness, Wallace needs to integrate the two. Because he cannot, he becomes miserable. Whether or not Wallace finally succeeds in integrating these two warring aspects of his psyche is a matter still open to the interpretation of the individual reader. He does come to recognize and value the world the garden represents; but we never really know for sure if he succeeds in returning to the garden.

The conflict between aesthetic and practical or scientific concerns was one that Wells knew from firsthand experience. Throughout his life, he felt the pull of competing interests. Wells escaped the lower-middle-class life of his parents by winning a scholarship to the London University, where he studied biology. While writing his first book—a biology textbook—Wells was already writing fiction and publishing short stones. At the time he wrote "The Door in the Wall," Wells was deeply involved in politics himself and had just finished a nonfiction book called *A Modern Utopia*. Wells returned to the conflict between imagination and reason repeatedly in. his writing. On

the one hand, Wells had a profound faith in scientific progress to create an ever-better society. On the other, he was well-aware of the dangers of divorcing progress from social responsibility. His famous novel, *The Island of Dr. Moreau*, published in 1896, depicts a misguided exponent of scientific progress who tries to turn beasts into humans. In *The Invisible Man*, Wells again raises the question of whether science and humane interests are compatible. An outcast scientist discovers a way to make himself invisible and plans to use the knowledge to terrorize the world.

Of course, Wells was neither the first nor the only writer to take up the conflict between the aesthetic/imagmative side of human nature and the rational/scientific side. These are age-old concerns. In his *Republic* (upon which Wells based his *A Modern Utopia*), Plato derided all artists, especially writers, because he thought they served no purpose other than to inflame emotions and make people unreasonable. What is remarkable about the different ways writers have approached this conflict, from Plato to Wells, is that they all see these two "worlds" as irreconcilable opposites. Wells poses the problem as an either/or question. There seems to be no possibility to have both worlds; no chance, for example, that Wallace might leave the garden door ajar and mix the two worlds together. This is odd because in our everyday lives we mix the two, just as Wells himself most certainly did in his time. Insisting on seeing the garden as irreconcilably opposed to the everyday practical world makes for a more dramatic story, but it means there is no possible ending to this story that is not pessimistic Wallace must choose one world or the other; he cannot have both. In the end he has either escaped the rational, practical world of his father and politics by returning to the garden, or he has been killed by the dream of it.

So what are we to make of this story? Lionel Wallace has worked hard, has done good things, and has tried to serve his country honorably. At least twice when he turns away from the green door it is in service to others; and he has frequently sacrificed his own desires to please his father and others. The work of people like Wallace is indispensable; it builds societies. And yet the garden appears in his life because it is something Wallace needs. Whether we read it as Freudian manifestation of a desire to rebel against his father or Jungian need to integrate the masculine and feminine aspects of his psyche, it seems clear that the garden represents something necessary to Wallace, even if the value of the garden can never be measured by the standards of the practical world. And perhaps that is the point. Plato banished the artists out of his ideal Republic; perhaps Wells warns us that we do so at our own peril.

Source: Deborah Williams, "An Overview of 'The Door in the Wall'," in *Short Stories for Students*, Gale, 1998

Critical Essay #2

"I have been greatly influenced in my life, work, and attitudes by the writings of H. G. Wells," Hammonds has written. An English writer, he has published several important works about Wells. In the following excerpt, Hammond analyzes the imagery in "The Door in the Wall" and illustrates how it contributes to the theme of opposition between reality and imagination.

'The Door in the Wall,' one of Wells's most deservedly familiar short stories, is the story of a prominent politician, Lionel Wallace, who is haunted by the vision of an enchanted garden glimpsed in childhood. The story makes extensive use of archetypal and dream imagery and interweaves within its narrative a pattern of leitmotivs characteristic of Wells as man and writer.

The door and the wall are described in such unforgettably vivid terms that the image is fixed indelibly on the imagination:

"There was,' he said, 'a crimson Virginia creeper in it—all one bright uniform crimson, in a clear amber sunshine against a white wall That came into the impression somehow ... and there were horse-chestnut leaves upon the clean pavement outside the green door They were blotched yellow and green, you know, not brown nor dirty, so that they must have been new fallen.'

The imagery of this passage becomes clearer when it is expressed in the following form:

white wall fallen leaves red creeper green door amber sunshine

The white wall is a feminine symbol, representing the gentle, motherly aspects of Wallace's (and, by implication, Wells's) nature. This is contrasted with the 'clear amber sunshine', a symbol for the masculine ego, for the dominant and logical as opposed to the passive and emotional. The door is a familiar psychological metaphor for the threshold between conscious and unconscious. In passing through the door and entering the enchanted garden Wallace leaves behind him the conscious, rational world of his daily life and enters the domain of imagination and dreams, a world in which the longings of his innermost self come to the fore. In the language of dreams leaves are an allegory for happiness. The leaves Wallace describes are 'blotched yellow and green', suggesting that his happiness is transitory. Though Wallace is blissfully happy inside the garden he never regains his sense of delight outside it and for the remainder of his life is tormented with 'the haunting memory of a beauty and happiness that filled his heart with insatiable longings, that made all the interests and spectacle of worldly life seem full and tedious and vain to him'. The symbolism of colour in this passage reinforces the contrasting masculine/feminine imagery on which so much of the story hinges. The whiteness of the wall (= moon, feminine, the anima) is juxtaposed against the amber sunshine and red creeper (= masculine, virile, dominant). The green door suggests femininity, the colour of Venus and Aphrodite. In opening the door and entering the

domain beyond, Wallace passes into the feminine realm of imagination and sympathy, leaving behind him the worlds of duty, career and ambition....

And it is at the moment when he returns to his moment of hesitation—'so at last I came to myself hovering and hesitating outside the green door in the long white wall'—that he loses sight of the beautiful garden. This element of ambiguity recurs throughout the narrative. At each crucial stage in the story Wallace is torn between conflicting desires.

This dichotomy is aptly symbolized by the contrasting female figures who befriend him in the garden. The first is described as 'a tall, fair girl' who takes him by the hand and fills him with 'an impression of delightful lightness, of being reminded of happy things that had in some strange way been overlooked'. This girl with her 'sweet kind face', pleasant voice and classical features is recognisably an anima figure, the embodiment of those qualities of femininity, allurement and mystery which haunt so much of English literature (cf. Estella in Dickens's Great Expectations, Beatrice Normandy in Wells's Tono-Bungay and Sarah Woodruff in John Fowles's *The French Lieutenant's Woman*). It is she who initiates Wallace into the enchanted garden, who leads him into conversation and guides him through the paradisal domain. She is contrasted with 'a sombre dark woman, with a grave, pale face and dreamy eyes ... wearing a soft long robe of pale purple'. This enigmatic figure shows him a book containing scenes from his life up until the moment of entering the garden. When, in his eagerness to learn what happens next, he attempts to turn the pages Wallace remembers that '*she bent down upon me like a shadow and kissed my brow* (my italics)5. This dark woman with a grave bearing and sombre expression can be seen as the Shadow, a personification of the unconscious, instinctive aspects of his make-up. It is she who looks at him sadly while he follows the story of his life and she who resists his fingers while he struggles to look into the future. She recognises his nature and is aware that, though fascinated by the garden, he is destined to leave it behind him in his quest for career and influence. The two figures symbolise the contradictory drives which pull him throughout his life: the one happy, beckoning, mysterious; the other austere, emotionless, dutiful. The dichotomy haunts him throughout his career. When, later in life, he suddenly catches sight of the door in the wall he experiences 'c *queer moment, a double and divergent movement of my will* (my italics)'. He is filled with a sense of 'unforgettable and still unattainable things':

Those dear friends and that clear atmosphere seemed very sweet to me, very fine but remote. My grip was fixing now upon the world. I saw another door opening—the door of my career

It is significant that when he looks back to the moment of first seeing the door, he remarks: 'I forgot the sort of gravitional pull back to the discipline and obedience of home, I forgot all hesitations and fear, forgot discretion, forgot all the intimate realities of this life.' Discipline, obedience, discretion, reality—it is these which are momentarily laid aside in the quest for beauty and enchantment.

'The Door in the Wall' is built up on this pattern of opposites, a very characteristic feature of Wells's fiction. The enchanted garden with its beautiful people and aura of peace and happiness is continually contrasted with the 'grey world' outside the wall—

with the bullying at school, the tawdry world of politics, the demands of career and ambition The garden is described in terms which convey an unmistakable echo of the Garden of Eden:

There was something in the very air of it that exhilarated, that gave one a sense of lightness and good happening and well-being; there was something in the sight of it that made all its colour clean and perfect and subtly luminous. In the instant of coming into it one was exquisitely glad—as only in rare moments, and when one is young and joyful one can be glad in this world. And everything was beautiful there ..

What is so striking about these descriptive passages is the extensive use of contrasting imagery: masculine—feminine; conscious—unconscious; life—death; inner—outer; immortality—transience. It is as if Wells is deliberately posing a series of contradictions. The hard, masculine spikes and the gentle doves; the cold marble and the brightly coloured paraquets. The broad red steps and the great avenue of trees symbolise Wallace's journey through life, his progression to higher levels of consciousness. At the climax of his journey he arrives at a spacious palace filled with fountains, an apt metaphor for the unconscious, for the centre of his imaginative life: full of the promise of beauty and desire. The 'grass-covered court' suggests the enclosed quality of Wallace's life, the fact that the only real happiness he ever knows takes place within the confines of the garden. But the delightful games with his companions are played against a backcloth of 'very old trees', and a sun-dial surrounded by flowers. Always one is reminded of time, of the transience of beautiful things. In the 'marble seats of honour and statuary' can be detected a precogmtion of his worldly ambitions, his successful political career. But what are we to make of the 'old man musing among laurels'9 The laurel is traditionally an emblem of victory, of a triumph over odds. The venerable figure musing among these symbols of conquest reinforces the ambiguity of Wells's parable: which is Wallace to conquer— his ambitions or his dreams9 It is this element of doubt which pervades the story to the end.

If one takes the garden as a metaphor for the imagination, the theme of the story can be read as Wallace's recognition of his true nature. On the one hand, imagination and wonder ('I became in a moment a very glad and wonder-happy little boy'); on the other hand, reality and conformity. These are the competing drives which pull him in opposite directions throughout his life.

Source: J R Hammond, "Lost Orientations," in *H. G. Wells and the Short Story*, St. Martin's Press, 1992, pp 125-31.

Critical Essay #3

In the following excerpt, Haynes examines Wells's depiction of the conflict between science and imagination in "The Door in the Wall."

'The Door in the Wall' ... partakes very largely of the aura of fairy tale, even of myth, albeit one that is psychologically valid It concerns the politician Lionel Wallace, who once, as a child of a joyless, inhibiting home, discovered a door to a visionary garden of happiness. This door presented itself to him as simultaneously attractive and illicit, and it has reappeared temptingly at critical moments throughout his distinguished public career. Hitherto he has remained true to the latter, passing by 'the door that goes into peace, into delight, into a beauty beyond dreaming, a kindness no man on earth can know.' Wallace is subsequently found dead in an excavation, having one night apparently mistaken the workmen's door in the hoarding for the door in the wall of his garden. The story poses a question to which Wells returned repeatedly in his writing—the contrast between the aesthetic and the practical, scientific inclinations of man and the difficulty of choosing between them

I am more than half convinced that he had, in truth, an abnormal gift, and a sense, something—I know not what—that in the guise of wall and door offered him an outlet, a secret and peculiar passage of escape into another and altogether more beautiful world. At any rate, you will say, it betrayed him in the end. But did it betray him1' There you touch the inmost mystery of these dreamers, these men of vision and the imagination. We see our worldfair and common, the hoarding and the pit. By our daylight standard he walked out of security into darkness, danger and death.

But did he see like that?

This theme recurs in several guises in Wells's work, being part of a wider contrast between tangible and imaginative elements of experience, or between science and aesthetics, a conflict which was all too pertinent to Wells's own experience. Wells has often been seen as being caught on an intellectual battle-ground between his scientific training in rational thought and his native gift of a vivid imagination. He himself was apparently aware of this conflict intermittently during his science course at South Kensington, when poetry seduced attention from geology practical work, [*Experiment in Autobiography*] and he portrayed a similar struggle in several student characters—in Lewisham and in William Hill of 'A Slip Under the Microscope'— and at greater length in George Ponderevo's dalliance with art. Thus even in a manifest fairy story, 'The Door in the Wall,' Wells is preoccupied with a question, partly psychological, partly sociological, raised by his own experiences as a science student It is certainly conceivable that this divided intellectual allegiance still beset Wells in the literary field— how far was his imagination justified in leaping beyond the limits of the scientifically acceptable postulates of his day? Or alternatively, how far did a desire to put forward a point of view as scientifically as possible emasculate his potential literary gifts?

Source: Roslynn D. Haynes, "Scientific Method and Wells's Credentials," in *H. G Wells-Discoverer of the Future The Influence of Science on His Thought*, *New York University Press*, 1980, pp 49-50

Critical Essay #4

Buckley is a distinguished American educator and literary scholar whose studies focus primarily upon Victorian literature. In the following excerpt, he briefly outlines Wells's "The Door in the Wall" and suggests that the ending is open to interpretation.

Early in the new century H. G. Wells suggested through a compelling short story both the spell and the menace of a nostalgia for a buried time. "The Door in the Wall"—patently sexual in much of its symbolism and implication—describes a lonely child's vision of an enchanted garden, behind a green door in a high white wall, where the intruder feels instant joy and "a keen sense of homecoming," and where a benevolent somber woman, "very gentle and grave," shows him a picture book of his own life. Before opening the door, the boy has had not only the strong desire to do so, but also "the clearest conviction that either it was unwise or it was wrong of him—he could not tell which—to yield to this attraction," and he has known instinctively that "his father would be very angry."Af-terwards, when his father, who is a lawyer and a grim rationalist, punishes him for telling lies about the garden, he succeeds in suppressing the memory. But he can never quite forget, and now and again throughout his career he catches glimpses of the strange familiar door in the wall: once when his eagerness not to be late for school overcomes his wish to stop, once when he cannot afford to let anything interfere with his arrival at Oxford for a fellowship, once when he does not care to keep a lady waiting. Eventually he achieves distinction in politics and is even asked to join the Cabinet; but he is dissatisfied always with his successes and tortured by increasingly frequent thoughts of the bypassed door. In the end his dead body is found at the bottom of a deep excavation; he has apparently wandered through an unlocked gate in the hoarding. It remains a question whether the dream of a lost peace and security has ultimately released him from the distractions of the world or merely betrayed him.

Source: Jerome Hamilton Bucldey, "The Passion of the Past," in *The Triumph of Time: A Study of Victorian Concepts of Time*, History, Progress, and Decadence, Cambndge.MA The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1966, pp. 113-14.

Critical Essay #5

Bergonzi is an English literary critic and writer of fiction and poetry who has written full-length critical studies on the works of H. G. Wells, T. S. Eliot, and Gerard Manley Hopkins. In the following excerpt, he provides an overview of Wells's "The Door in the Wall," offering his interpretation of the symbolism of the door.

The politician Lionel Wallace is, in the eyes of the world, a successful man; but, as he confides to the friend who tells the story, he has a 'preoccupation' that is gradually dominating his life and even affecting his efficiency. As a child of five he had wandered out of his home and through the streets of West Kensington, where he had noticed a green door set in a white wall. It was immensely attractive to him, and he had a very strong desire to open it and pass through (he somehow knew that it would be unfastened), but at the same time he felt an equally strong conviction that this would be wrong or unwise: in particular he felt his father would be very angry if he did so. Nevertheless, he yields to the temptation and finds himself in a beautiful garden. (One is reminded here of the garden which Alice sees through the little door in Chapter I of Alice in Wonderland.) Wells's account of the garden tries to give the sense of a child's paradise but is scarcely satisfactory; nevertheless, it can be accepted as shorthand for a type of locus amoenus. It has a rare and exhilarating atmosphere, its colours are clean and bright, and the child is filled with joy. There are rich flower-beds and shady trees, and various animals, including two splendid tame panthers. He meets a tall fair girl who 'came to meet me, smiling, and said "Well?" to me, and lifted me and kissed me, and put me down, and led me by the hand. ..'

He meets other children and they play games together, though he cannot remember the games (a fact which later causes him much distress).

Then presently came a sombre dark woman, with a grave, pale face and dreamy eyes, a sombre woman, wearing a soft long robe of pale purple who earned a book, and beckoned and took me aside with her into a gallery above a hall—though my playmates were loth to have me go, and ceased their game and stood watching as I was earned away. 'Come back to us1' they cned 'Come back to us soon!' I looked up at her face, but she heeded them not at all. Her face was very gentle and grave She took me to a seat in the gallery, and I stood beside her, ready to look at her book as she opened it upon her knee The pages fell open. She pointed, and I looked, marvelling, for in the living pages of that book I saw myself; it was a story about myself, and in it were all the things that had happened to me since ever I was born___

When the record of the book reaches the point at which he had found himself outside the green door, the whole enchanted world vanishes, and the little boy is once more in the dismal West Kensington streetThroughout his later life he dreams of revisiting the garden, and at long intervals he has unexpected glimpses of the door in the wall, in different parts of London, but always when the exigencies of his immediate circumstances make it impossible—or at least, highly inconvenient—for him to stop and open the door. The child's vision, as Wells presents it, has all the marks of a return in

fantasy to a prenatal state: the door is an obvious womb-symbol. This suggestion is emphasized when we recall that Wallace's mother had died when he was two: the tall fair girl who greets him when he arrives in the garden, and the sombre dark woman who initiates him into the events of his life after birth (and who is referred to as 'the grave mother') can both be taken as aspects of the mother he had scarcely known. Yet Wells' s picture is not exclusively Freudian in its implications; it also has elements of an older mode of regarding prenatal existence—the Wordsworthian. This is apparent in the reference to the children with whom the little boy plays, and who call him back when the dark lady draws him aside:

Hence in a season of calm weather Though inland far we be, Our Souls have sight of that immortal sea Which brought us hither, Can in a moment travel thither, And see the Children sport upon the shore....

After his mother died Wallace had been brought up by a governess; his father is described as 'a stern preoccupied lawyer, who gave him little attention and expected great things of him'. In the sphere of public life his father's expectations are fulfilled, for Wallace has an unusually successful career. Yet his constantly cherished secret desire to return to the garden represents a potential revolt against his father's authority; had he not, as a boy of five, felt that his father would be very angry if he went through the green door? We have here the elements of an Oedipus situation: ultimately Wallace destroys himself in daring to risk, for the second time, his father's displeasure, by opening the door and returning to the delectable world which he identified with his dead mother.

This fate is, in a sense, predictable, but on the narrative level the way in which Wells brings it about is extremely adroit. Wallace tells his friend that three times in the past year he has seen the door, and on each occasion he has passed it by: once because he was on his way to a vital division in the House of Commons, once, significantly, because he was hurrying to his father's death-bed, and once because he wished, for reasons of personal ambition, to continue a discussion with a colleague. And now his soul 'is full of unappeasable regrets', and he is barely capable of working.

A few months later he is dead:

They found his body very early yesterday morning in a deep excavation near East Kensington Station. It is one of two shafts that have been made in connection with an extension of the railway southward It is protected from the intrusion of the public by a hoarding upon the high road, in which a small doorway has been cut for the convenience of some of the workmen who live in that direction. The doorway was left unfastened through a misunderstanding between two gangers, and through it he made his way.

On the next apparition of the door, we may assume, Wallace resolved, at whatever cost, to open it and rediscover his garden; this represented a virtual and perhaps an actual abandonment of his career (and so struck, symbolically, athis father). At this point Wallace's visions—or hallucinations, if we prefer it—and the physical world around him were in fatal conjunction. There is a certain grim irony in the fact that the deep pit into

which Wallace fell can be seen as just as much of a womb-symbol as the enclosed garden he was seeking,

Source: Bernard Bergonzi, "The Short Stones," in The Early H G. Wells: A Study of the Scientific Romances, University of Toronto Press, 1961, pp. 84-7

Critical Essay #6

In the following excerpt, Ward offers his interpretation of the symbolism of the garden in Wells's "The Door in the Wall," paying particular attention to the deceiving nature of time and happiness.

Turning to the Parables in The Country of the Blind, we find three stories that can be thus designated: "The Door in the Wall," "The Beautiful Suit," and "The Country of the Blind." The first describes how Lionel Wallace, when a little fellow between five and six years old, wandered through West Kensington streets one day, and came to a green door set in a white wall. The door attracted the child, as it were magnetically, so that he opened it and discovered a wonderful and beautiful garden stretching far and wide, with distant hills. He found delightful playmates there; and, afterwards, a grave and sombre woman who took him to a seat and showed him a book:

The pages fell open. She pointed, and I looked, marvelling, for in the living pages of that book I saw myself, it was a story about myself, and in it were all the things that had happened to me since ever I was born

In a while the grave woman stooped to kiss the boy's brow, and at that moment he found himself crying in a long grey street in Kensington. He thought he would be able to find that door again whenever he went to look for it; but he could not. He did see it again, several times in his life, but it was always in some different locality; and Wallace was always prevented by some immediately urgent worldly call from passing again through the door. A time came when he determined that nothing whatever should keep him away from the wonderful garden whenever next he should see the green door in the white wall; and one morning his body was found in a railway excavation near East Kensington Station, beyond a hoarding in which a small doorway was cut. .. The advantage of both this story and "The Beautiful Suit" is that they may be interpreted according to the temper of the individual mind. Wallace's mysterious garden might be any one of those fine aspirations by which men are moved, and from which they are debarred by the fret and wear and tear of the workaday world. Men cry: "We have no time for the beauty that lies beyond the door in life's wall. We are too busy to-day; let our time for rest and the sweet things of life be to-morrow." And when that remote to-morrow dawns at last, the wonderful garden of which they had the freedom in childhood, eludes them after all, and in the hour of delusion they walk behind a hoarding—into the pit beyond. Yet that is not all, maybe. H. G. Wells says of Lionel Wallace:

I am more than half convinced that he had, in truth, an abnormal gift, and in sense, something—I know not what—that in the guise of wall and door offered him an outlet, a secret and peculiar passage of escape into another and altogether more beautiful world At any rate, you will say, it betrayed him in the end But did it betray him"? By our daylight standard he walked out of security into darkness, danger, and death

But did he see like that

Source: Alfred C Ward, "H. G. Wells," in Aspects of the Modern Short Story English and American, University of London Press, Ltd, 1924, pp 139-41.

Topics for Further Study

Research three scientific advances of the first decade of the twentieth century, when Wells was at the peak of his popularity. How did these advances affect people's everyday life9 Write about other scientific advances that have been made since Wells's time.

Wells is regarded as one of the most prominent champions of the early twentieth-century spirit of British liberal optimism. Fmd out what British liberal optimism was. You may want to consult David Daiches's *New Literary Values*, (1936), specifically the chapter "Literature and Belief';

G. K. Chesterton's *The Victorian Age in Literature* (1912), especially the chapter "The Breakup of the Compromise"; or William H. Marshall's *The World of the Victorian Novel* (1967). What events have taken place since the early 1900s that have eroded British liberal optimism?

Do some biographical research on Wells You may want to consult your school's encyclopedias, *H. G.. The History of Mr. Wells*, by Michael Foot (1995), or *The Importance of H. G. Wells*, by DonNardo (1992). How did Queen Victoria's political views influence Wells?

Compare and Contrast

1900s: "The Door in the Wall" is written in a time when the British are concerned with domestic matters. King Edward VII begins his reign following the death of Queen Victoria in 1901. In Parliament, the Conservatives are divided on several issues and the general election of 1906 puts the Liberals in power by a significant majority. As the ruling party, the Liberals create Britain's early welfare program. The Labour Party is formed during this time as well, with 29 original members.

1997: In May, after eighteen years of Conservative rule, the Labour Party wins the majority of seats in the House of Commons, and the Party's leader, Tony Blair, becomes Britain's youngest prime minister since 1812. The Conservatives, or Tones, suffer their worst defeat since 1906. Blair is said to represent a new Britain, a more liberal, multicultural society.

1900s: A prevalent attitude in Britain is one of liberal optimism, the belief that scientific advancements have vastly improved the quality of life, and that there is little, if anything, left to discover. In 1905, Albert Einstein publishes a paper that outlines his theory of relativity. The incandescent electric light bulb, invented by Thomas Edison in 1879, proves to have an enormous impact on how people spend their time by the turn of the century.

1990s: Scientific advancements are made in a number of fields, most notably in medical research dealing with cancer and AIDS, and in space exploration. In 1996, scientists successfully clone a sheep, causing great debate concerning bioethics. In 1997, the plutonium-powered Cassini space probe is launched to explore Saturn.

What Do I Read Next?

Wells's 1895 novel *The Time Machine* gives a glimpse of the distant future, suggesting that the evolution of humankind is not necessarily progressing toward a more refined species.

Wells's nonfiction book A Modern Utopia (1905) established him as a leading proponent of socialism, world government, free thought, and free love, and as an enemy of the entrenched English establishment.

Charles Darwin's monumentally important study, The Origin of Species (1859), was a huge influence on Wells The book asserts that Homo Sapiens have evolved from other creatures.

Edward Bellamy's classic novel Looking Backward (1888) describes an ideal social and industrial system of the future. Wells was ambivalent about such notions of progress, at times embracing them and at other times suspecting that Bellamy's embrace of the concept of scienu'sm— progress driven by science—was shallow and not in balance with human nature.

"The Bungalow House," a story by Thomas Ligotti, published by Carroll & Graf in The Nightmare Factory (1996), concerns the fracturing of a man's mind and his preoccupation with a house he sees every day while riding the bus.

William Morris's famous novel News from Nowhere (1890) describes an idyllic Utopia of social and ethical progress. Wells felt the same way about this book as he did about Bellamy's.

Frances Hodgson Burnett's The Secret Garden (1909) tells the story of ten-year-old orphan, Mary Lennox, who gains the key to a mysterious walled rose garden at her uncle's mansion. The book is considered the first modern novel for children.

Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* (1865) is a story of a logical girl who falls down a rabbit hole into a strange land. It is considered a premier example of fantasy literature by an author who also had an extensive background in mathematics.

Further Study

Batchelor, John H. G Wells, pp. 4-107. *Cambridge Cambridge University Press*, 1985.

Provides an overview of Wells's "The Door in the Wall," offering an interpretation of the door's symbolism and commenting on the narrative style of the story.

Huntington, John. The Logic of Fantasy H G Wells and Science Fiction, pp. 50-91. *New York Columbia University Press*, 1982.

Analyzes the imagery in Wells's "The Door in the Wall" and illustrates how the imagery contributes to the theme of opposition between reality and imagination.

Wood, James Playsted 1 Told You Sol A Life of H G Wells,pp 109-22. *New York Pantheon*, 1969.

Examines Wells's style of depicting the conflict between science and imagination, and contends that the theme of conflict between the two is paramount in "The Door in the Wall"

Copyright Information

This Premium Study Guide is an offprint from *Short Stories for Students*.

Project Editor
David Galens

Editorial
Sara Constantakis, Elizabeth A. Cranston, Kristen A. Dorsch, Anne Marie Hacht, Madeline S. Harris, Arlene Johnson, Michelle Kazensky, Ira Mark Milne, Polly Rapp, Pam Revitzer, Mary Ruby, Kathy Sauer, Jennifer Smith, Daniel Toronto, Carol Ullmann

Research
Michelle Campbell, Nicodemus Ford, Sarah Genik, Tamara C. Nott, Tracie Richardson

Data Capture
Beverly Jendrowski

Permissions
Mary Ann Bahr, Margaret Chamberlain, Kim Davis, Debra Freitas, Lori Hines, Jackie Jones, Jacqueline Key, Shalice Shah-Caldwell

Imaging and Multimedia
Randy Bassett, Dean Dauphinais, Robert Duncan, Leitha Etheridge-Sims, Mary Grimes, Lezlie Light, Jeffrey Matlock, Dan Newell, Dave Oblender, Christine O'Bryan, Kelly A. Quin, Luke Rademacher, Robyn V. Young

Product Design
Michelle DiMercurio, Pamela A. E. Galbreath, Michael Logusz

Manufacturing
Stacy Melson

For more information, contact
The Gale Group, Inc
27500 Drake Rd.
Farmington Hills, MI 48334-3535
Or you can visit our Internet site at
http://www.gale.com

Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Short Stories for Students (SSfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, SSfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels

frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of SSfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of SSfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in SSfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by SSfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

SSfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Short Stories for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the SSfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the SSfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Short Stories for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Short Stories for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from SSfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Short Stories for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from SSfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Short Stories for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of SSfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Short Stories for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of SSfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Short Stories for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

Editor, Short Stories for Students
Gale Group
27500 Drake Road
Farmington Hills, MI 48331-3535