

# The Time Machine Study Guide

## The Time Machine by H. G. Wells

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# Introduction

*The Time Machine* was first published in 1894 as a serial under the name *The Time Traveller* in the *National Observer*. It was brought out as a book the next year under its current name and sold more than six thousand copies in a few months. H. G. Wells was just twenty-seven years old when the story, which came to be called a "scientific romance," was published. Wells's friend, William Henley, edited the *National Observer*, and Wells became part of a group of writers called "Henley's young men." The novel's appeal lies in its attempt to fathom what will become of human beings in the distant future. By making the central character of his story a time traveler who can transport himself back and forth in time with the aid of a machine he invented, Wells is able to explore many of the themes that obsessed him, including class inequality, evolution, and the relationship between science and society. In describing the future world of the effete Eloi and the cannibalistic Morlocks and the world beyond that in which all semblance of human life has been erased, Wells illustrates what he believes may very well be the fate of humanity. The novel's enduring popularity is evident in the three films adapted from the novel and the scores of others inspired by it.

## Overview

The Time Machine is deservedly considered a science fiction classic. In it, Wells creates the intriguing world of the Morlocks and the Eloi, based on his concepts of human and social evolution.

In this future world, the long-term dangers of an exaggerated class structure, in which the "have nots" are oppressed by the "haves," become apparent. In Wells's view, as often expressed by the time traveller, exploitation of the working classes produces a race of subhuman Morlocks, while years of selfindulgence and dependence lead to the moral degradation of the Eloi.

Apart from its social, philosophical, and economic themes, the book also appeals to readers because of its vivid description and rapidly unfolding plot.

Few characters among the traveller's London circle of friends have names, but their actions give them personalities. On the other hand, except for Weena, no one in the world of the future needs individualizing. Only their racial uniformity seems to matter, a fact that shows clearly in their actions. Wells coaxes the reader into acceptance of the novel's basic scientific premise—the concept of time as the fourth dimension—both by the logic with which the time traveller explains his machine and by the vividness of his trips through time.



## Author Biography

Born in Bromley, England, on September 21, 1866, Herbert George Wells was raised in relative poverty by his father, Joseph Wells, a failed shopkeeper turned professional cricket player, and his mother, Sarah Neal Wells, a housekeeper. Wells, however, used his circumstances as a spur rather than a crutch, reading voraciously as a child in an effort to create a better life for himself. At sixteen, Wells became a student teacher at Midhurst Grammar School and was later awarded a scholarship to the Normal School of Science in London. T. H. Huxley, who, next to Darwin, was the foremost evolutionary theorist of his day, was Wells's biology teacher, and he helped to shape Wells's thinking about humankind's past and its future. Wells taught for three years after taking a bachelor of science degree in 1890, and a few years later he began writing full-time.

His first novel, *The Time Machine*, published in 1895 and hailed as one of the first great works of science fiction, was one of Wells's most popular novels and is one of his most enduring. Its success gave him the confidence to pursue his strategy of using fiction to dramatize scientific concepts such as the fourth dimension, Darwin's theory of natural selection, and Marx's theory of class struggle. In 1896, Wells published *The Island of Dr. Moreau*, about a scientist who experiments in breeding animals with human beings. Other well known Wells novels include *The Invisible Man* (1897) and *The War of the Worlds* (1898), the latter of which formed the basis for Orson Welles's infamous radio broadcast on October 30, 1938. In that broadcast, which millions of listeners took seriously, Welles announced that Martians had landed on Earth.

Wells was also passionate about history and politics and developed a reputation as a reformer, joining the Fabian Society, a socialist group whose members included writer George Bernard Shaw, and running for Parliament as a Labour Party candidate. As an internationally celebrated writer, he traveled to countries such as Russia, where he met with Vladimir Lenin and Josef Stalin, and the United States, where he met with President Franklin D. Roosevelt and discussed, among other topics, the implications of *The Time Machine*. Wells was also a supporter of the League of Nations, a precursor to the United Nations, serving on its Research Committee and penning books about its aims.

One of the most prolific and wide-ranging writers of the twentieth century, Wells wrote more than one hundred books, including biology textbooks, collections of short stories and literary criticism, and studies of the world economy, British imperialism, and Russian communism. He continued writing until the end of his life. Some of his later books include *Guide to the New World: A Handbook of Constructive World Revolution* (1941); *The Outlook for Homo Sapiens* (1942); *Phoenix: A Summary of the Inescapable Conditions of World Reorganisation* (1942); *A Thesis on the Quality of Illusion in the Continuity of Individual Life of the Higher Metazoa, with Particular Reference to the Species Homo Sapiens* (1942); *The Conquest of Time* (1942); *Crux Ansata: An Indictment of the Roman Catholic Church* (1944); and *Mind at the End of Its Tether and The Happy Turning: A Dream of Life* (1946). At the end of his life, Wells, who had lived

through two world wars, became increasingly pessimistic about humanity's future. He died in London on August 13, 1946.

## About the Author

Herbert George Wells was born in Bromley, Kent, England, on September 21, 1866. His father was an unprosperous shop keeper, his mother a head housekeeper for a Sussex estate.

Wells always loved to read, but his early formal education was uneven. At thirteen, he was apprenticed to a dry goods merchant. Four years later, after negotiating a release from his apprenticeship agreement, he obtained a teaching position at Midhurst Grammar School and simultaneously continued his studies. A year later, at eighteen, he won a scholarship to the Normal School of Science at South Kensington. There he studied under T. H.

Huxley, whose ideas on biology and science were a lasting influence. During three years of study, he participated in the socialist gatherings of the Fabian Society in London.

After brief stints as a biology teacher, reader for a correspondence school, and textbook writer, Wells turned to journalism for his livelihood. Writing fiction in his spare time, he published *The Time Machine* when he was twenty-nine years old. Although he wrote over a hundred books during his career, this first novel is probably his most famous.

Wells wrote on scientific topics throughout his life, creating a genre of stories known as "scientific romances," the literary precursor of science fiction.

Between 1895 and 1901 he published *The Time Machine*, *The Island of Dr.*

*Moreau*, *The Invisible Man*, *The War of the Worlds*, *The First Men in the Moon*, and "The Star," a short story included in *Tales of Space and Time*. Between 1905 and 1910 Wells produced a series of comedies—*Kipps* (1905), *Tono-Bungay* (1908), and *The History of Mr. Polly* (1910)—in which he depicts numerous scenes from his earlier life. In fact, many of his fictional scenes were drawn from his own experiences. For example, images of the cellar kitchen where he played as a child, the tunnels that connected below-stairs areas at an estate where his mother worked, and the poor basement rooms of his apprenticeship days were embellished to create the underground world of the Morlocks in *The Time Machine*.

One major novel came out of World War I—*Mr. Britling Sees It Through* (1916), a perceptive portrayal of the pain and futility of war. After the war, Wells turned more seriously to teaching and pontificating. He produced a series of nonfiction books and began using his novels as vehicles for social, economic, and political ideas. He was a prolific writer of essays and commentaries, and became a sought-after lecturer, consultant, and free-lance journalist. He gained a reputation as a sage and a prophet, and indeed many of the things he envisioned in his writings—such as space travel, air warfare, and atomic bombs— eventually became realities.





Wells died in London on August 13, 1946, a year after atomic bombs were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Although many of his philosophical writings now seem dated, Wells's scientific vision, particularly as it is revealed in his earlier fiction, continues to convey his profound creative imagination.



# Plot Summary

## Chapter 1

Mayor, Filby, and Hillyer, the narrator. As the Time Traveller describes how time is the Fourth Dimension, his guests argue with him, claiming that it cannot be a dimension because people cannot move through it as they can through space. The Time Traveller excuses himself and then returns with a machine, which, after the Psychologist pushes its small lever, disappears, allegedly into the Fourth Dimension. The Time Traveller then shows the group a larger version of the time machine and announces he plans to travel through time.

## Chapter 2

A week later, Hillyer, the Medical Man, and the Psychologist meet again at the Time Traveller's house, where they are joined by three newcomers: Blank, Dash, and Chose. The group begins dinner but is interrupted by the Time Traveller, who suddenly appears, haggard, thin, and dirty. After refreshing himself and eating, the Time Traveller promises to recount his story of where he has been, asserting that he has lived eight days since four o'clock that afternoon. The men are skeptical, especially Hillyer, who says, "The fact is the Time Traveller was one of those men who were too clever to be believed."

## Chapter 3

In this chapter, the Time Traveller tells his story, beginning with a description of time traveling, which he calls "excessively unpleasant." Traveling faster than a year per minute, the Time Traveller describes the disorientation he feels flying through time as seasons pass in a blur. He finally decides to land, pulling on the lever to bring his machine to a crashing halt in the middle of a hailstorm. Through the hail, the Time Traveller sees an enormous sphinx carved of white marble and huge buildings and a forest. In a frenzied panic, he rushes back to the machine from which he had been thrown, desiring to leave. Just then, a group of strange creatures approaches him. He regains his confidence, and his fear subsides when one of them, four feet tall and dressed in a purple tunic, walks up to him.

## Chapter 4

It is 802,701 A.D., and the Time Traveller describes the race of small creatures as being on the intellectual level of five-year-olds. The creatures take him to a large building, where a number of them sit around and eat fruit. He learns they are vegetarian and live communally in one building, with the sexes mingling freely with each other. The Time Traveller becomes frustrated by the creatures' diminishing curiosity about his presence and his inability to communicate with them. Noting the creatures' indolence and the



generally dilapidated look of the buildings, the Time Traveller speculates that the creatures evolved from the human race, growing weak because they had managed to decrease their population and to erase all "hardship and vigor" from their existence. His speculation about the creatures echoes both Karl Marx and Darwin's theories of economics and evolution respectively. At the end of the chapter, the Time Traveller signals that his guesses about the creatures are wrong.

## Chapter 5

In this chapter, the longest in the novel, the Time Traveller discovers that his machine is missing, and he sets about to find it, guessing that it is in the base of the White Sphinx. However, he cannot open the panel to access it, and the Eloi he asks to help him all refuse. Exploring the Thames River Valley, the Time Traveller sees deep circular wells, and he speculates they are part of a vast ventilation system. Once again, his assumption will later be proved wrong.

Wells further dramatizes Marx's and Darwin's theories, as the Time Traveller learns more about the Eloi, the creatures he is staying with and whose name he learns, and is "introduced" to the Morlocks, a hideous race of underground creatures who resemble apes, with white skin and enlarged eyes, who prey on the Eloi. The Time Traveller learns about the Eloi largely through Weena, a female he rescues from drowning, while other Eloi passively watch. Weena stays with the Time Traveller, sleeping with him at night, even though she is dreadfully afraid of the dark. He later learns her fear is related to the Morlocks, who "harvest" Eloi in the dark to eat. The Time Traveller theorizes that the two races "evolved" out of the working class and the "owning" class of Victorian England. The Morlocks were the working class and had been driven underground, where they continued to work with their machines, while the Eloi were the capitalist class, who had grown dependent on the Morlocks for everything in their lives.

## Chapter 6

The Time Traveller discovers a large green building, which he refers to as the Palace of Green Porcelain. He will come back to this building later in the story. For now, he braces himself to explore the underground world of the Morlocks. Weena is too afraid to follow him into the well, but the Time Traveller continues, wending his way through a maze of underground tunnels, eventually coming across a large battery of machines on which the Morlocks are hard at work. As Morlocks come toward him, the Time Traveller scares them off with a match, but he runs out of matches just as he escapes from the underground lair.

## Chapter 7

In this chapter, Weena and the Time Traveller begin their journey back to the Palace of Green Porcelain but must sleep outside on a hill because night is descending. The Time Traveller muses on the insignificance of his own existence in relation to the universe



and speculates on the nature of the relationship between the Morlocks and the Eloi, concluding that the underground mutants are keeping the Eloi alive both out of habit and for meat. This disgusts him and further spurs him to find his time machine.

This chapter is significant because it marks the only time that the Time Traveller stops his narrative to provide proof of his journey, pulling out "two withered flowers" that Weena had placed in his jacket pocket and putting them on the table for others to see.

## Chapter 8

The Time Traveller and Weena arrive at the Palace of Green Porcelain, which the Time Traveller inspects, discovering that it is a vast museum containing the ruins of "latter day South Kensington," with sections for natural history, paleontology, and geology. When Weena and the Time Traveller leave the museum, the Time Traveller arms himself with a box of matches and a lever he had broken off a machine in the museum with which to defend themselves against the Morlocks.

## Chapter 9

In this chapter, Weena and the Time Traveller set out for the White Sphinx, where the latter believes the time machine is being kept. The two are attacked by Morlocks, and the Time Traveller lights matches to ward them off, beating them with a mace. Weary from their fighting and travel, the two fall asleep. They awaken to see frenzied Morlocks running from a raging fire the Time Traveller had set earlier. In the confusion, the Time Traveller leaves Weena behind in the burning forest.

## Chapter 10

The Time Traveller finds the bronze panels at the base of the White Sphinx open and the time machine waiting for him. He jumps inside, and the Morlocks lock the doors behind him. After fighting off some of the ape-like creatures, the Time Traveller eventually starts the machine and jets into the fourth dimension.

## Chapter 11

The Time Traveller lands at a time of "abominable desolation" in which there is no trace of humanity but plenty of horrendous giant crab-like creatures and enormous centipedes scurrying about in the "inky blackness." The Time Traveller has difficulty breathing and surmises the air is thinner in the future. He travels even further into the future, thirty million years, only to find that all life has vanished, except a ghastly football-sized blob trailing tentacles against the blood-red water.

This chapter is significant because it marks the only time that the Time Traveller stops his narrative to provide proof of his journey, pulling out his guests, all of whom remain



skeptical except for Hillyer, who returns the next day for more proof. The Time Traveller tells him that he will travel to the future and return in a half hour with just such evidence. Hillyer sees the Time Traveller disappear in a blur and waits for him to return, but he does not. The story ends with Hillyer saying that it has been three years since the Time Traveller left, and he has not yet returned.

## Epilogue

Hillyer speculates on where the Time Traveller might be and notes the Time Traveller's pessimistic view of human progress. Even if the future is bleak, Hillyer says, human beings must live as if it is not while retaining hope for the future. This hope is symbolized by the two flowers that Weena had given the Time Traveller and that now belong to Hillyer.



# Chapter 1

## Chapter 1 Summary

The book opens in the home of the Time Traveler. The dinner guests include the narrator, the Medical Man, the Psychologist and Mr. Filby, and the Very Young Man. After dinner, the Time Traveler and his guests sit in the smoking room and become involved in a discussion of science. The Time Traveler tells his guests that geometry is based on a misconception. He begins to speak of the Fourth Dimension, which is Time. He tells his guests that modern science has overlooked the Fourth Dimension, which he tells them is no different from the other three. The reason it is overlooked, according to the Time Traveler, is that this is the dimension in which humans move throughout their lives.

The Time Traveler speaks of scientists working on models and mathematics of the Fourth Dimension and mentions Professor Newcomb of the New York Mathematical Society. His guests are not easily convinced and do not believe it is possible to move throughout time. The Time Traveler tells them it is possible to move through time because it is just another kind of space. The Psychologist, the Very Young Man, the Medical Man and the narrator begin an excited discussion about the possibility.

The Time Traveler tells them he has been working on a time machine. He brings out his model of the time machine and tells his guests he has been working on it for the past two years. The Psychologist presses the lever; the model disappears. The narrator remarks that the model became ghost like in appearance before disappearing. He does not think it was a trick. The Time Traveler then takes his guests to the laboratory and shows them the full-scale model of the time machine. He tells them he plans to use it to visit and explore places in time.

## Chapter 1 Analysis

The Time Machine takes place in Victorian London. This time is a time of significant mathematical and scientific advances. These advances were often the topic of conversation among educated men of the time. Even the most open minded would have a hard time believing in the possibility of time travel. When the Time Traveler's guests doubt his theories on time travel, he brings out the model and has the Psychologist press the lever. Even after the experiment, none of the men really believes the model traveled in time.

The class system in Victorian England is seen in the lack of names for the dinner guests. Each man is identified by his profession. People are judged based on their status in life. Part of that status is one's profession. Communism is a big topic of discussion and the guests wonder if the people of the future are communist.



## Chapter 2

### Chapter 2 Summary

Although they do not believe the experiment, most of them think about it all week. The following Thursday, they are invited back to dinner. This time the Journalist and the Editor join them. When they arrive, the Medical Man is there with a note from the Time Traveler. The note states that he will be a bit late and the Medical Man should start dinner. The Time Traveler arrives, as they are about to start dinner. He is dirty, has cuts and bruises and he is limping. He takes a drink and excuses himself to be cleaned up.

When he returns, his guests are eating dinner. They are relaying the story of the experiment to the Journalist and the Editor. The atmosphere is one of disbelief and ridicule. The Time Traveler is starving for meat and eats voraciously. The narrator asks him if he was traveling through time. He tells them he left his laboratory earlier in the day and traveled eight days in four hours.

### Chapter 2 Analysis

The idea of time travel becomes more believable in this chapter. The Time Traveler returns extremely hungry for meat. He looks pale and is dirty and injured. This opens up questions as to where he has been and why he is starving for meat. When he goes upstairs to clean and change, the guests from the previous week relay the story of the model to the new guests. Most of the guests, including the newly arrived Journalist and Editor, believe the time machine is a hoax. The narrator asks the Time Traveler if he has been traveling in time.



# Chapter 3

## Chapter 3 Summary

Sitting in the smoking room after dinner, the Time Traveler begins his story. He finished the time machine at ten o'clock that morning. When completed, he says he barely touched the forward lever and the clock read 3 p.m. He presses the lever again and the light gets dim. He is still in the room, but the maid does not see him when she walks through. He watches day and night pass in quick succession. Initially, he is still in his laboratory, but this changes and he is eventually outside. From there, he watches trees grow and wither and buildings going up and coming back down.

The feeling is exhilarating, but Time Traveler begins to worry about hitting something when he stops. He comes to a stop on a hill near a large winged white statue. He sees large buildings and begins to ponder changes in the human race. His fear subsides as he exits the machine. He sees frail looking people dressed in robes approaching him.

## Chapter 3 Analysis

When the Time Traveler begins his tale, the book becomes a story within a story. As the Time Traveler is relaying the story to his guests, the narrator is sharing the story with the reader. This chapter includes a description of what the Time Traveler sees as he is speeding through time. Advancement and decline are seen by the architecture being built and then destroyed. When the machine stops, he begins to express concern for the changes in the human race. He notices the frailty of the people.





# Chapter 4

## Chapter 4 Summary

Approximately ten people gather around the machine. They are speaking in a strange language and begin touching the Time Traveler and the machine. He removes the levers, so the machine cannot accidentally be moved. The people, called the Eloi, all have short hair, small ears and mouths, and pointed chins. The Eloi are childlike; they put flowers around his neck and ask him if he came from the thunderstorm. He nods in agreement and thinks they are on the intellectual level of a five-year-old child in his time.

As they lead him into the grey building, he notices the landscape. Although it looks unkempt, there are no weeds. In the building, the Time Traveler finds tables filled with fruit. They eat only fruit because all animals are extinct in the year 802,701. During dinner, he makes an unsuccessful attempt at communication and observes the Eloi. He tells his present day dinner guests that he had a hard time distinguishing males from females. He is impressed by their lack of interest in him. They approach to look at him, but then wander away, leaving him on his own.

The Time Traveler walks up the crest of the hill and finds a rusted yellow chair overlooking the area. He notices that the Thames River is about a mile away from its position in his time. He sees no signs of agriculture or property lines, it looks like one huge garden. He interprets what he sees to be the decline of humanity and believes it is the result of advances being made in his time. The lack of weeds is the result of agricultural advances in weed control during his time. There are no bugs or communicable diseases in 802,701. He thinks medical advances have wiped out all diseases. There also seem to be no social problems and no manual labor. The Time Traveler tells his guests that his theories would be proved wrong during his stay with the Eloi.

## Chapter 4 Analysis

Wells was a student at the Royal Academy of Sciences in London. He studied Darwinian theory of evolution. Darwin and his followers believed evolution was a process that was not yet finished. The physical changes in human beings are the first thing he notices when he lands. The lack of manual labor has resulted in smaller and weaker people. Their frailty shows the weakness and softness of humanity because of the advances in technology. Initially the Eloi approach the Time Traveler and his machine with interest, but they lose interest in him quickly. Their lack of interest shows the decline of the human intellect. He believes these advances have resulted in the decline of humanity. The advances of modern society can be seen in the landscape as well. The lack of weeds and bugs are the result of agricultural practices in the past.

The Eloi live a communist lifestyle. Wells was a socialist and saw some merit in communist theory. The description of the Eloi and their way of life show communism as a carefree lifestyle. The negative side of communism is shown as well. Most anti communist people use as their argument the fact that people will lose initiative in a communist society. The lazy and unintelligent Eloi represent the dangers of communism. Initially, the world of the Eloi looks inviting until he realizes their lack of intelligence and curiosity. He equates the Eloi to five-year-old children.



# Chapter 5

## Chapter 5 Summary

At sunset, the Time Traveler starts down the crest to find the grey building and a place to sleep. He discovers his time machine is gone. In a panic, he runs into the grey building, where the Eloi are sleeping in groups. He demands to know where the machine is, but they do not understand. He goes back outside to continue his search in spite of their cries of terror. He falls asleep next to the White Sphinx.

The Time Traveler wakes in the morning and his panic returns. He fears being stuck there if he cannot find his machine. He sees marks in the ground that lead him to believe his machine is in the pedestal of the statue. He tries to convey his suspicion, points to the statue, but the Eloi turn away and act insulted. In frustration, he grabs one man and drags him to the statue. He lets go when he sees the fear in the man's eyes. The Time Traveler finds a large rock and starts hammering on the pedestal. The little people watch from a distance.

When his attempt to recover the machine fails, the Time Traveler decides to have patience. If he learns about their culture and language, he will find clues. When he returns to the building, the Eloi avoid him. Their language is simple, with only one or two word sentences and no descriptive language. He explores the land and finds it all looks the same. He finds wells scattered about, but no water only the sounds of machinery. He drops a piece of paper in the well and it is sucked down immediately. He takes this to mean the wells are a ventilation system that is partly responsible for the lack of disease among the people.

The Time Traveler calls 802,701 the Golden Age and compares learning about it to African slaves learning about England. In his explorations, he finds no sign of tombs for burying the dead. He also finds no sign of stores, appliances or machinery. The Eloi seem to live in a Utopia and spend all their time eating, bathing in the river and making love. On the third day of his visit, he sees a woman begin to drown, but the other Eloi do not help. The Time Traveler saves Weena, and she begins to follow him like a child. Like the other Eloi, she is afraid of the dark and prefers to sleep in a group. The Time Traveler sleeps alone and eventually she joins him.

The night before meeting Weena, the Time Traveler woke during the night to see white ghost-like creatures outside. On the fourth day, he sees a building with stones blocking the entrance. When he investigates, he sees one of the white creatures he had seen during the night. The creature looks like a white ape with hair on its head and back. The Time Traveler realizes that somewhere along the line, humanity split into two groups. This new species, the Morlock, is subterranean and has the characteristics of subterranean animals. He comes to believe the Morlocks serve the Eloi and they are responsible for the disappearance of the time machine. He begins to understand their fear of the dark, but when he questions Weena, she cries and refuses to answer.



## Chapter 5 Analysis

This chapter is spent describing the Time Traveler's search for his machine and his exploration of the people of the Golden Age and their culture. Further evidence is given regarding the theme of communism. The Eloi live and sleep in large groups. There are no individual homes. He can find no evidence of industry, creativity or labor on the part of the Eloi. Their extreme fear of the dark is seen when they cry in terror at him leaving the building at night to look for his machine.

This is explained after his first sighting of the Morlocks. As a student of evolution, he recognizes that the human race has split. Darwin believed that evolutionary changes helped a species adapt to changing environments. The Morlocks adapted to life beneath the earth's surface by taking on characteristics of subterranean animals. Their coloring and inability to see in daylight are examples of these changes.

The concept of Social Darwinism is seen in this chapter. Many people believed that humans evolved in the social and financial realm, as well as physically. They took the concept of survival of the fittest to include financial success and a higher place in the class system. The elite and wealthy experienced success because they were biologically predisposed to succeed. Those in the lower classes were there due to their own inferiority. The working class evolved into the Morlocks in the Golden Age. The prevalence of Social Darwinism explains the Time Traveler's belief that the Morlocks serve the Eloi.

The Morlocks are not the only ones to experience change. The Eloi originated from the upper class of the past. However, rather than evolving to perfection, they become lazy, weak and stupid. The complexity and beauty of the human language has been lost and the Eloi speak in simple, two word sentences. As the Morlocks have evolved into more animalistic versions of humanity, so have the Eloi. They eat, bathe, have sex and sleep, but do little else. Human intelligence and creativity have vanished. As the Morlocks resemble wild animals, the Eloi resemble domesticated animals.



# Chapter 6

## Chapter 6 Summary

The Time Traveler begins to share the Eloi's fear of the dark. He needs to go underground to find the machine, but is afraid to go alone. He begins exploring to the Southwest and finds the Palace of Green Porcelain. The next day, he descends one of the wells, in spite of Weena's protest. As he descends, the sound of machinery grows louder. When he enters the tunnel, he sees three Morlocks and discovers they are afraid of fire. He realizes he is unprepared for the encounter and only has matches, but no weapon. Upon entering a dark cavern, he sees a carcass, but does not know what it is. He feels the Morlocks touching him and escapes by setting a piece of paper on fire to scare them and climbing up the well.

## Chapter 6 Analysis

This chapter offers more evidence of the Morlocks decline into a race of wild animals. They have lost almost all of their human characteristics. The carcass he sees in the cavern is that of a human being. They have deviated so far from the Eloi; they no longer view eating humans as taboo. The Time Traveler sees the carcass and states he did not know what it was. Deep down, he did know, but in his day, the thought of cannibalism was so completely unaccepted that his mind could not grasp the possibility at first.

In the tunnel, the Time Traveler discovers the Morlocks' fear of fire. Apparently, the ability to make fire has been lost in the year 802,701. The Morlocks live in darkness. The heat and bright light of fire cause the Morlocks to experience fear, which allows the Time Traveler to escape back out of the well.



# Chapter 7

## Chapter 7 Summary

The Time Traveler is losing hope of escaping this world. His hatred of the Morlocks begins to feel instinctual. He thinks the Eloi used to be the aristocracy and that the Morlocks still provide for their needs out of habit. He decides to make a weapon before attempting to retrieve his machine. The Time Traveler and Weena go to the Palace of Green Porcelain. At this point in the story, the Time Traveler pulls two strange white flowers out of his pocket and places them on the table. He tells his guests Weena picked these on the way to the Palace and he found them in his pocket when he returned home.

Weena and the Time Traveler spend the night on a hill at the edge of the woods leading to the Palace of Green Porcelain. She sleeps, but he stays awake trying not to think about the Morlocks. He fears he knows what they eat, but the thought is too horrible to consider. In the morning, they eat a breakfast of fruit and watch Eloi dancing in the sunshine.

The Time Traveler feels pity for this generation. His thoughts turn again to the diet of the Morlocks. He thinks they lived on vermin after the animals became extinct. When there were no more vermin, they turned to cannibalism. The Morlocks are less human than the earliest men are. The Eloi are cattle for the Morlocks. The Time Traveler believes this life is a punishment for human selfishness. He hatches a plan to make a weapon and a torch. He will use these to open the base of the White Sphinx and escape in his machine. He works out the details of this plan on the way to the Palace of Green Porcelain. By the time they arrive, he has decided to take Weena back with him.

## Chapter 7 Analysis

The Morlocks live in a communist society as well. Like the Eloi, they live in groups and there is no property ownership. In communist theory, the idea of people developing class-consciousness results in the realization and resentment of their lower status. This realization in lower classes causes them to revolt against the ruling class. Originally, the Morlocks were the working class and did serve the Eloi. Over time, they became dissatisfied with their life of servitude and the balance of power shifted. They now provide for the Eloi either out of habit, or like a farmer cares for his cows before sending them to the slaughter.

An explanation is offered in this chapter for the diet of the Morlocks. At some point, due either to nature or human interference, all animal food sources have vanished from the earth. Initially, the Morlocks fed on vermin. When that food supply was exhausted, they turned to the only available meat supply, the Eloi. Since the branches of humanity were so far removed from each other, the Morlocks see using the Eloi as a food source as



necessity rather than cannibalism. The Time Traveler discovers that the lack of disease is not the result of medical advances, but of the Morlocks eating the sick Eloi just as animals in the wild prey upon the sick and weak of other animal species.

The theory of entropy can be seen in the people of the Golden Age. Entropy contradicts evolution. In entropy, the belief is that over time civilization will unravel. Disorder and a gradual loss of energy is the eventual outcome for humanity. This loss of energy is seen in the weak and tired Eloi. They no longer have the drive necessary to create and improve the world. The improvements made throughout human history have led to the weakening of the species.

A definite shift in the Time Traveler's attitude toward this chapter in human history is seen in this chapter. Upon arrival, he thought of this place as a kind of Utopia. The world looks beautiful and harmonious. On closer inspection, he sees the horrors caused by the advances made by mankind.

The Time Traveler feels trapped in this world. He has seen the changes in humanity are not a good thing. Advancement has led to decline. Lack of weeds and pests have resulted in the loss of natural food sources for the people, causing the current situation. An easy and carefree life has resulted in the loss of the initiative, intelligence and creativity that separate humanity from other animal species. He pities the people of the Golden Age.

The Time Traveler recognizes changes in himself, as well as the Morlocks and Eloi. After encountering the Morlocks, he begins to take on the fears of the Eloi. He states that his hatred feels like instinct. The Eloi and Morlocks have both traded the use of intellect for instinctual behavior. The Morlocks hunt the Eloi for a food source as animals hunt for food in the wild. The Eloi have become as gentle creatures preyed upon by larger animals in the wild. Recognizing these fears in him cause him to feel scared and trapped.

He is losing hope of escape, but knows he must continue to try or be doomed to the life of the Eloi. The Time Traveler and Weena set out for the Green Palace to find weapons to use against the Morlocks. In this chapter, Wells briefly returns to the present when the Time Traveler takes the flowers Weena picked him on their journey out of his pocket and places them on the table. This offers a bit of proof to substantiate his claims of time travel. This proof makes the story more believable to his guests and the reader.



# Chapter 8

## Chapter 8 Summary

When they arrive at the Palace, the Time Traveler discovers it actually is made of porcelain. He sees an inscription, but cannot read it. The Palace is a museum. He sees dinosaur skeletons and finds glass cases from his time. He wanders into the natural history section, but finds all the specimens to be decayed. In the machinery section, he looks for a weapon to use against the Morlocks. He notices the ground sloping and feels the Morlocks are close by. He begins to hear the sound of machinery beneath him and pulls a lever off a machine to use as a weapon. All the books in the library are rotted and the Time Traveler cannot help but feel the authors wasted their time.

They enter a gallery devoted to Chemistry. The Time Traveler finds a full book of matches and a sealed jar filled with camphor. Weapons are found intact, but the ammunition is rotted. They begin the journey back to the grey building. The Time Traveler is looking for a place to spend the night, safely. In the morning, he plans to break into the base of the statue and retrieve his time machine.

## Chapter 8 Analysis

The Time Traveler's despair at the decline of humanity can be seen inside the Palace. In the museum, he sees room after room dedicated to the advances made by men throughout time. The museum is old and does not explain the final changes that caused the current environment. He does see a library wing full of rotten books. This represents humanity's loss of knowledge and creativity. His despair is seen in the statement that the writers wasted their time. Writers write not only for their own generation, but also for generations to come. History is recorded both to educate future generations and in the hope that those future generations will use the information to avoid repeating the mistakes of previous generations. If the future generations are illiterate, what is the purpose in the writing?

In the Palace, the Time Traveler finds the weapons he hoped to find. In the Chemistry wing, he finds camphor and working matches. Being aware of their fear of fire, he takes these items to use in warding off the Morlocks. He pulls a lever off a machine to use in defending himself and Weena against Morlocks on their return journey. He plans to use these weapons to retrieve his machine and escape this world with Weena.





# Chapter 9

## Chapter 9 Summary

On the return journey, the Time Traveler sees three Morlocks crouching in the brush. Although it is dark, he decides they will be safer if they can reach the other side. Since the Morlocks are afraid of fire, he decides to light some firewood to keep them away. The fire spreads and causes a large forest fire. Farther along in the woods, the Time Traveler builds a campfire, and he and Weena fall asleep. When he wakes, he feels Morlocks pulling at him and biting. He reaches into his pocket but the matches are gone. He starts hitting them with the lever and they flee.

The woods are on fire and he cannot find Weena. He follows the path of the Morlocks out of the woods because he does not know which way to go. On the hillside on the other side of the woods, he sees between thirty and forty Morlocks. He begins hitting them with the lever, until he realizes the light of the fire blinds them. In the morning, he still cannot find Weena and decides the Morlocks must have left her in the woods. He is glad because at least they did not eat her. He starts walking back toward the White Sphinx and finds a few loose matches in his pocket.

## Chapter 9 Analysis

The Time Traveler must fight off Morlocks on his return journey to the White Sphinx and his time machine. He knows that fire is his best weapon against the creatures. He sets some wood on fire to keep them away, but the fire spreads causing the death of Weena. He realizes his mistake and feels sorry for the death of Weena, but believes that death is better than being eaten by Morlocks. He lit the fire almost instinctually to allow them to escape from the Morlocks. If he had been using his intellect, he would have realized the danger in lighting a fire in a dry, wooded area. However, he is relying on his instinct and self-preservation in this land of instinctual beings.

When he finds his way out of the woods, he runs into a large number of Morlocks on the hillside. He begins to fight them off until he realizes they cannot see him. They are blinded by the light of the fire. Their evolution into subterranean creatures has cost them the loss of their eyesight. As strong and fearsome as they are, without their sight they are as weak and helpless as the Eloi.



# Chapter 10

## Chapter 10 Summary

It is midmorning before he reaches the rusted yellow chair he found on his first day. He sees the same beautiful landscape and realizes the life of the Eloi is similar to cattle in a field. Their end will be the same as well. He mourns the brevity of the human intellect. The Eloi once lived a life of absolute safety with health and no unsolved social issues. He believes there is no need for intellect when there is no need for change. The upper class has become feeble, but beautiful. The lower kept their initiative and remained industrious.

When they lost all other sources of meat, the Morlocks turned to what was once unthinkable. Since they had lost so much of their humanity, they lost the taboo of cannibalism. After a brief nap, the Time Traveler approached the White Sphinx. He was surprised to find the valves to the base of the statue open. Inside he finds a small apartment and his time machine, cleaned and oiled. The doors close and he is in the dark. He finds that his matches will not work without the pack. He climbs on the machine and puts the levers in their place. He pulls the last lever and the approaching Morlocks slip away.

## Chapter 10 Analysis

This chapter finds the Time Traveler back in the same yellow chair where he sat on his first day in the Golden Age. His impressions of the place have changed dramatically. On the surface, the land is still beautiful, but he has witnessed the horrors beneath. He watches the Eloi and thinks their life and death will be no different from cattle. Wells explains the lack of creativity of the Eloi with their easy lifestyle. If there is no need for change, there is no need for creativity and intelligence. The Time Traveler mourns the loss of the human intellect.

The fate of the Eloi serves as a warning to Victorian England of the consequences of the rich exploiting the working class. The author's belief in the dangers of too much progress is shown in this chapter. The abuses against the workers result in the evolution of the Morlocks. Unlike the Eloi, the Morlocks have retained their ingenuity out of necessity. They did not have the easy and carefree life that led to the decline of intellect in the Eloi. Their lack of food and subterranean existence compelled them to retain problem-solving skills.

The Time Traveler wakes from his sleep and decides to enter the White Sphinx to look for his time machine. The White Sphinx has the wings of an angel and is reminiscent of the Egyptian Sphinx of old. It appears that the new inhabitants of the planet hold religious beliefs similar to those held by ancient civilizations. This is another example of



the decline of mankind. They have lost modern religion and philosophy and have returned to idolism and the simple religions of the past.

The Time Traveler is surprised to see the bolts have been removed from the panel in the base of the statue. The Morlocks have set a trap for the Time Traveler by opening the valves to the White Sphinx. This shows the initiative in the Morlocks. They have not lost as much of their intellect and abstract thinking as the Eloi. They have examined the time machine, but do not understand its use. They think the Time Traveler will be trapped inside the statue.

The clean and well-oiled time machine shows the interest the Morlocks took in the machine. The Time Traveler realizes this and worries that they may have damaged it. When he climbs into the machine, the Morlocks close the door, leaving him in darkness. His matches are useless without the box. The Time Traveler walks into the trap, but escapes in his time machine.



# Chapter 11

## Chapter 11 Summary

As he hurls into the future, the Time Traveler discovers he is not seated properly in the seat. He notices the variations of day to night are getting slower. It gets gradually slower until the sun stopped setting altogether. The sun is more red and larger as time goes by. The stars are fading and the earth faces the sun on one side. The sun rises and sets in the west. The sky is red overhead and in the southwest. In the northeast, the sky is completely black with no stars to be seen. The earth is in perpetual twilight.

He sees red rocks and dark green foliage. There is no wind and no waves in the ocean. The air is very thin, making it difficult to breathe. The only creatures he sees are enormous white butterflies and giant crabs. As he is watching one crab, he feels another touching him with its antennae from behind. He hits the lever and goes forward again. When the Time Traveler stops again, it is thirty million years into the future. The beach seems lifeless and bitter cold. The ocean is blood red from the eternal sunset. He watches what remains of the sun being eclipsed by what he first thinks is the moon, but realizes it is a planet much too close to the earth.

The sky becomes completely black with the eclipse. He is horrified by the silence and complete darkness. The Time Traveler feels cold and nauseated. He gets off the machine and sees a black creature with tentacles flopping around in the water. He is disoriented and he feels as if he will faint. The thought of fainting in that place gives him the strength to get back on the time machine.

## Chapter 11 Analysis

This chapter again shows the themes of entropy and decay. Farther in the future, Earth has become uninhabitable for humans in any form. The loss of energy that is a basic tenet of entropy is seen in the sun. It is burning out and losing strength. The earth's ultimate destiny is decay and eventual destruction due to the sun's loss of energy.

Life on Earth is in further decline. The theory of evolution holds that all life on Earth began in the sea. In the distant future, life has returned to the sea. Large crustaceans and the black creature with tentacles exist, but the earth no longer has the energy to sustain them and help them evolve as it did when life began. It is almost as if evolution is happening in reverse.

The fear of darkness is again seen in the Time Traveler's response to the eclipse. The world grows suddenly dark, evoking fear in the Time Traveler similar to the fear felt in the presence of the Morlocks. Everything the Time Traveler believed before beginning his journey has been disproved. Evolution is not a completely positive thing. The species on earth will not evolve to perfection, but beyond perfection and into decay.



# Chapter 12

## Chapter 12 Summary

The Time Traveler is returning home. He sees the housekeeper walk through the room again, only in reverse this time. He tells his guest the only difference is the time machine is in the opposite corner of the room. His explanation for this is that it is the distance from the hill to the White Sphinx. The Editor tells the Time Traveler he should write stories. The Time Traveler does not blame them for not believing and states he hardly believes it himself.

The Medical Man asks him where he really got the flowers. The Time Traveler's memory of his trip is fading. He runs to the laboratory with his guests following. The Time Machine is in the opposite corner from where it had been the week before. It is covered with smears, grass and moss. The Time Traveler tells his guests the story is true.

The narrator visits the Time Traveler the next day and enters the lab. The Time Traveler is not there, but the machine is in the same corner. The narrator barely touches the lever and the machine begins to shake. The narrator lets go as the Time Traveler enters the lab. The narrator asks him if it is a trick. The Time Traveler tells him it is true and asks the narrator to wait a half hour and join him for lunch. While waiting, the narrator remembers an appointment and enters the lab to tell the Time Traveler. The time machine and the Time Traveler are both gone. He thinks he sees a ghost image of it and then nothing. The narrator decides to wait for him to return. At the end of the book, he has been waiting three years.

## Chapter 12 Analysis

The Time Traveler returns home as his guests are beginning dinner. He tells them what he has seen, but they still do not believe him. The narrator is the only one open to the idea that the story could be true. It is not only the theory of time travel they have trouble believing, but the fate that awaits the human race. As believers in evolution and Social Darwinism, they hold the belief that change is good. They are unable to accept the idea that the human race will deteriorate into an animalistic race. Thus far, change has been largely good and they believe it will continue to be good far into the future.

The men at the dinner table are part of the elite class. They cannot and will not accept their future as a food source for the working class. The ideas are so completely unbelievable that the Time Traveler begins to doubt his own story. He runs to the laboratory to check the time machine. When he finds it in the opposite corner, battered and dirty from his journey, he is reassured that it is all true.

The narrator is open to the possibility of truth in the Time Traveler's story. After spending the night thinking it over, he visits the next day to confirm the validity of the story. He

gets his proof when he enters the lab and sees the ghostly shape of the machine before it disappears.



# Epilogue

## Epilogue Summary

The narrator wonders if the Time Traveler will ever return. He thinks he went either to the past or to a closer time when their race was still human. He remembers that the Time Traveler did not think well of the advances in modern society. He believed this civilization was a heap destined to fall. The narrator says that for him the future looks bleak and dark. He states his reason for saving the flowers was "to witness that even when mind and strength had gone, gratitude and a mutual tenderness still lived on in the heart of man." With these words, Wells ends his book.

## Epilogue Analysis

The Time Traveler has been gone for three years. In the epilogue, the narrator speaks directly to the reader. He wonders where the Time Traveler's journey has taken him this time. His belief in the story is shown when he wonders if the Time Traveler found a closer time when humans were still human. The fact that the future looks dark to the narrator offers further proof in his belief in the Time Traveler's account of the future. What is the point of modern technological advances, if it will end in humanity's ruination?

The narrator states the belief held by the Time Traveler, and Wells, that the advances being made are not necessarily beneficial to humanity. These advances will end in the downfall of the human race. The picture is not entirely pessimistic. The final quote shows that the human heart will still be capable of love and tenderness even when society has deteriorated to a nearly prehistoric state. Humans will still have feelings of tenderness and gratitude until the end.



# Characters

## Blank

The editor of "a well-known (but unnamed) daily paper," Blank—also referred to as "the Editor"—is a "rare visitor" to the Time Traveller's home. He is skeptical when told of the experiment the week before, and when the Time Traveller appears during dinner, his clothes rumpled and dirty, he makes fun of him, asking, "Hadn't they any clothes brushes in the Future?" The Editor also disbelieves the Time Traveller after he tells his story, remarking, "What a pity it is you're not a writer of stories."

## Dash

Attending the second dinner, Dash—also referred to as the Journalist—"is more interested in his own stories than those of the Time Traveller."

## The Eloi

Descended from the owning classes of nineteenth-century Britain, the Eloi live in 802,701 A.D. and are small, childlike creatures who spend their days playing and lounging. Vegetarians, they sleep together in large halls as protection against the Morlocks, who prey on them at night. Although initially intrigued by the Time Traveller, they quickly lose interest in him, except for Weena, a female Eloi the Time Traveller rescues from drowning.

## Filby

Filby appears in the second chapter and is described as "an argumentative person with red hair." He is a rationalist who does not believe the Time Traveller's claims. He is also not very bright. Hillyer says that if Filby had presented the time machine and explained it instead of the Time Traveller, "a pork-butcher could understand."

## Hillyer

Hillyer is the narrator and the only person who believes the Time Traveller's story. The bulk of the novel is the Time Traveller's story, as told to Hillyer. However, Hillyer directly addresses readers in the first, second, and twelfth chapters, and in the epilogue. Unlike the Time Traveller, who is pessimistic about humanity's future, Hillyer maintains hope, saying that even if the Time Traveller's story is true and that humanity is doomed for extinction, "it remains for us to live as though it were not so."





## Medical Man

The Medical Man, also referred to as "the Doctor," is one of three guests present at both dinners. The others are Hillyer and the Psychologist. He holds a note from the Time Traveller and a watch and suggests that the group begin dinner on time, as the Time Traveller had instructed. Although he takes the Time Traveller seriously at first, he grows skeptical, believing that the Time Traveller has tricked them with his demonstration in the first chapter.

## The Morlocks

In 802,701 A.D., the Morlocks live underground running their machines. Descended from Britain's nineteenth-century working class, the ape-like creatures have large eyes, white skin, and fur, and are fearful of light and fire. They also prey upon the Eloi, whom they use as a food source. They pursue the Time Traveller through the middle of his story, but he eventually beats them off and escapes into the future in his time machine.

## Provincial Mayor

The Provincial Mayor is present at the first dinner. He has never heard of the fourth dimension and, in general, does not appear to know much about science.

## Psychologist

The Psychologist is present at both dinners and engages the Time Traveller when he explains his theory. He says that historians would find time travel especially useful, noting, "One might travel back and verify the accepted account of the Battle of Hastings, for instance!" The Time Traveller chooses him to pull the lever on the model in the first chapter.

## Time Traveller

The Time Machine is comprised mostly of the Time Traveller's story, as told to Hillyer. A well-to-do yet socially conscious inventor and a man of science who lives in Richmond, he creates a machine that allows him to travel in the fourth dimension. He has twinkling gray eyes and a pale face that is usually flushed. Well educated in the leading theories of his day, such as evolution and communism, the Time Traveller moves quickly from observation to speculation but acknowledges when he has been wrong and rethinks his position. The Time Traveller remains excited about the future, even after he learns by traveling in the future that humankind will not survive and that all trace of life will be wiped off the face of the earth. He is also a very witty man who often makes jokes at his own expense. His humor and history of playing practical jokes on his guests is one



reason his guests suspect that his story is not true. Hillyer says of him that he "had more than a touch of whim among his elements."

## **Very Young Man**

The very young man is at the first meeting only, participating in the discussion about time travel.

## **Weena**

Weena is an Eloi that the Time Traveller saves from drowning when other Eloi ignore her. A source of information about the Eloi, she accompanies the Time Traveller as he searches for the time machine, and the two develop a strong bond. The night before the Time Traveller returns to the past, she dies in a fire the Time Traveller sets to ward off Morlocks.

## Setting

Geographically the story is confined to a small area near the Thames River in South Kensington, a suburb of London; it is the shift in time that makes the setting unusual. The story ostensibly opens in the year of its telling, 1895, in the home of the unnamed time traveller.

As the traveller takes over the role of narrator, the machine moves him into the year A.D. 802,701. Society has evolved into two races, the upper-world Eloi and the lower-world Morlocks. The narrator remains in the future for a week, during which time most of the action occurs.

As the time traveller explores the upper world, he frequently refers to the Thames, which has changed its course slightly since 1895, and to neighboring places, but he is primarily concerned with the idyllic rural surroundings and seeming innocence of the world's childlike inhabitants. He interprets the apparent ease and good health of the Eloi, the abundance of fruit and flowers, and the absence of annoying insects and weeds as a sign that humanity has mastered the problems of his own day.

Only when he explores one of the many well-like openings in the area does he find the foreboding underworld, the dwellings and factories of the bestial Morlocks.

To escape from the Morlocks, the traveller moves thirty million years into the future, where he finds a world on the verge of decay, apparently inhabited only by amphibious creatures, a world that he has no desire to explore before returning home.



## Social Concerns

On one level, *The Time Machine* is a straightforward satire of the society of late Victorian England. In the future year 802,701, the "Time Traveller" encounters the seemingly ideal society of the Eloi. These peaceful and playful people live in a pastoral land without industry and pollution. They share everything with one another: food, shelter, and the land. "Communism," the Time Traveller says to himself.

Victorian socialism seems to have triumphed in the far future, creating a happy and classless society. The weaknesses of the Eloi are that they are small, silly, and incapable of sophisticated abstract thought. Apparently, the comforts of their lives have shaped the evolution of the Eloi — they seem to have devolved, that is retrogressed in their physical and mental abilities.

Then, to his horror, the Time Traveller discovers the Morlocks, who live underground. They live in an industrialized world that provides some of the basic needs of the Eloi. Pale white and unable to tolerate even moonlight, at night they climb out of the ground to feed on the Eloi. The Time Traveller realizes now what has happened to humanity: "It seemed clear as daylight to me that the gradual widening of the present merely temporary and social difference between the Capitalist and the Labourer was the key to the whole position . . . There is a tendency to utilise underground space for the less ornamental purposes of civilization; there is the Metropolitan Railway in London, for instance . . . Even now, does not an Eastend worker live in such artificial conditions as practically to be cut off from the natural surface of the earth?" The Morlocks are the descendants of industrialized society's laborers. Furthermore, the upper classes try to shut out the lower classes from high society, making "intermarriage which at present retards the splitting of our species along lines of social stratification, less and less frequent."

The "Haves" have become the Eloi, indolent and childlike, who are the descendants of those who fed off the labor of others. The "Have-nots" have become the Morlocks, who in a terrible twist of evolution feed on the helpless Eloi. The Morlocks and Eloi satirically represent the evils of a society in which wealth and goods are inequitably distributed. There is great anger in this satire; it comes from an author who at the time of writing thought he had little time to live and whose lower-class origins and lower-class accent had inhibited his advancement in spite of his intellectual promise.

Another social concern is implicit in *The Time Machine*: human evolution.

The novel depicts a far future, thus allowing enough time for the slow working of natural selection as Charles Darwin had conceived it. Some critics have misinterpreted this theme of evolution, arguing that it contradicts Wells's faith in technological progress.

This is unfair to Wells and is too simplistic. He believed progress was possible, but he believed evolution was inevitable. In *The Time Machine*, natural selection, which is only biological and thus indifferent to morality, has evolved humanity into two separate



species. In later writings, such as *The Shape of Things to Come* (1933), Wells plainly shows that he believes a worldwide calamity that destroys modern society may be necessary before a more just and progressive one evolves. In any case, people have the power to shape their futures, but those futures may not necessarily be progressive; humanity may devolve into beasts.

The idea of social and biological devolution has influenced many twentieth-century writers. For instance, Pierre Boulle uses the concept for the premise of *Planet of the Apes* (1963), in which humanity has devolved while apes have evolved. Another use of the idea is exemplified by L. Sprague de Camp's *Rogue Queen* (1951), in which a society devolves, although the people in it do not biologically degenerate. In these, as well as in *The Time Machine*, the notion that "progress" is not inevitable is important.

## Techniques

The Time Machine was written to make money as well as to make Wells's mark on literature. One technique he uses to hold the interest of readers is to have the Time Traveller relate his story as a marvelous adventure from which he has just returned. The atmosphere thus created gives the narrative the air of a fairy tale, as if he were Sinbad returned from sailing to enchanted lands, or Odysseus back home from his magical voyage through the lands of the cyclops, the sirens, and other mythical beings. Many critics refer to the tone thus created as "mythic," meaning it captures some of the basic beliefs of contemporary culture and gives them form and direction. The narrator serves the reader, asking the questions that sensible people would ask and focusing on the details that readers would want to know. Yet, the narrator is open-minded enough to allow himself a sense of wonder and therefore allows readers to marvel at the tale. In addition, The Time Machine is compact; its events are pressed close together. This gives the narrative a breathless speed, and the imaginative inventions of Wells rush one upon another, maintaining excitement.



# Thematic Overview

In 1895, H. G. Wells was underweight and suffering from respiratory illness; believing that he had only a short time to make his mark as a writer and in need of money, he assembled ideas that he had developed in magazine articles and crafted *The Time Machine*. In order to make it a profitable novel, he made it into a sensational adventure. He also made it thematically complex. The social satire is plain enough, but Wells also developed themes of beauty, the divided self, and, at bottom, good and evil. In a wellknown remark, author V. S. Pritchett declared, "The Time Machine . . . will take its place among the great stories of our language. Like all excellent works it has meanings within its meaning and no one who has read the story will forget the dramatic effect of the change of scene in the middle of the book, when the story alters its key, and the Time Traveller reveals the foundation of slime and horror on which the pretty life of his Arcadians [the Eloi] is precariously and fearfully resting."

The Time Traveller descends into the underground realm of the Morlocks. It is all "great shapes" and "grotesque black shadows" cast by the flames from his matches. Then: "The Morlocks at any rate were carnivorous! Even at the time, I remember wondering what large animal could have survived to furnish the red joint I saw." Slime and horror, indeed!

The land of the Eloi is lush with flowers and full of games and laughter.

Wells borrows from the ancient pastoral tradition, which entertains weary urban dwellers with tales of a "Golden Age" when people were one with nature and the problems of civilization were undreamt of. The Time Traveller even calls his "communist" paradise the "Golden Age." But the beautiful Eloi are not pastoral shepherds; they are the sheep, and the Morlocks are the wolves. The beauty of the world of the Eloi masks hideous ugliness.

In the hearts of the descendants of humanity, the spirits have withered.

"However helpless the little people in the presence of their mysterious Fear, I was differently constituted," observes the Time Traveller. "I came out of this age of ours, this ripe prime of the human race, when Fear does not paralyse and mystery has lost its terrors." In *The Time Traveller*, beauty and ugliness are still united in a whole man, and he can face both with courage. The Eloi refuse to even acknowledge the horror of the Morlocks; the Morlocks quail in the light. The symbolism in this implies that a life of only beauty and pleasure is a childish and empty one, even as the Eloi are like foolish children. To survive, humanity must face its ugliness.

The theme of the divided self was a common one in Victorian literature.

Usually, an author would use it to contrast strait-laced morality with hidden sexual desires. In *The Time Machine*, the Eloi are seemingly free of animal desires. On the other hand, the Morlocks are rapaciously hungry, and they are animal-like — afraid of



light, smelly, and without appreciation for beauty. Part of their ability to evoke horror may be the Morlocks' representation of the dark side of human nature.

A few critics have seen the portrayal of the evil of the Morlocks as a betrayal of The Time Machine's social themes.

Some have expected Wells to present a "communist" future society as an unalloyed triumph because he was a Socialist. Wells was too complex a man for such simplicity. While a member of the Socialistic Fabian Society in the first decade of the twentieth century, he tried to usurp the dominance of the society by George Bernard Shaw and Sidney and Beatrice Webb in part because as someone born into the lower classes he resented the presumption of those from well-to-do backgrounds telling people like himself what was good for them. Not everyone who said he was a Socialist was an ally, and not every society that looked ideal was good. In this sense, The Time Machine is "dystopian" because it portrays a future society that should be "utopian" but is instead an abomination.

At bottom, the novel has deep emotional resonance because it is an examination of good and evil, and as in real life, the two are not simple and are not easy to recognize: They are complicated. The Morlocks and the Eloi are two parts of modern man. Long after he has seen the "red joint" in the caves of the Morlocks, the Time Traveller refuses to acknowledge to himself that what he saw was a butchered Eloi.

Eventually, he comes to terms with the dark horror in himself and overcomes his political prejudice against the descendants of the "capitalist" exploiters of the working class. He recognizes evil in the Morlocks and realizes that some ethical values transcend politics.

Therefore, he takes action against the Morlocks. As a fully integrated man, he knows that evil flourishes when the spirit is lazy, as when the Eloi simply refuse to face the horror in their lives.

This knowledge motivates him to again ride his machine through time. Evil must be actively confronted.





# Themes

## Class Struggle

Prior to the eighteenth century in the West, a person was born into a caste and remained there until he or she died. After the eighteenth century and, with the proliferation of literacy and the standardization of currency, a class system began to emerge. More people had access to old professions, such as medicine and law, and new professions, such as writing and psychology, the latter of which are represented by the Time Traveller's guests. However, with the industrial revolution and the mass migration of rural laborers into the cities, the differences between the haves and the have-nots became more starkly visible. Wells capitalizes on the struggle between these two groups in his depiction of civilization 800,000 years in the future. When he first meets the Eloi, the Time Traveller initially believes society has evolved into a form of communism. However, as he learns more, he realizes that the class struggles of the nineteenth century have continued and are manifested in the relationship between the Eloi and the Morlocks.

## Science

In the nineteenth century, science became both a tool of understanding and a means of salvation. Numerous scientific theories and inventions helped science replace religion as the primary way that human beings related to their environment. Marx's theory of labor and capital and Darwin's theory of evolution described human beings as being in a constant struggle for survival, but inventions such as electricity, the telephone, and subways promised to make the struggle easier and people's lives more manageable. *The Time Machine* capitalized on the public's hunger for technology and the promise that technology offered. However, use of the time machine did not make life easier for the Time Traveller or result in any knowledge that could change the future. Rather, the Time Traveller's experiences showed a future of doom, as his journey revealed a world in which the struggles of the 1890s were not resolved but rather exacerbated. His journeys even deeper into the future revealed a world in which humanity had been extinguished from the face of the earth.

## Evolution

Evolution, a theory of life's origins and humanity's development, was a groundbreaking idea in the nineteenth century and literally changed the way that people thought about themselves and their place in the world. Biological evolution focuses on changes in a population over time. Wells helped to popularize Darwin's theory of evolution by presenting the scientific theory in a popular form, fiction. The Eloi and the Morlocks represent how human beings have genetically changed in the future as a result of their ability to adapt, or not, to their environments. The Morlocks, representing a mutation of



the working class of Wells's day, are ape-like, with large eyes and white skin, features that have evolved because they live underground. They fear the light and love the darkness. Conversely, the Eloi are effete, fragile, and fearful of the dark, a result of thousands of years of not having to work to survive. They represent the owning class. Ironically, the Morlocks rule the Eloi. Wells's genius is "translating" difficult concepts such as natural selection by dramatizing them in fiction.

## Scientific Romance

Wells helped to refine, science fiction's action is often set in the future and examines the relationship between the future and technology. It is also defined by the appearance of characters and setting being dramatically different from those of realistic fiction. For example, the Eloi and Morlocks could not appear in a story by Ernest Hemingway, a realist. Fantasy is also a popular genre but does not necessarily rely on scientific explanations for behavior or action. Rather, fantasy fiction explores supernatural and nonrational phenomena that may or may not exist in realistic settings. J. R. R. Tolkein's *The Lord of the Rings* is a popular example of fantasy fiction. Other scientific romances of Wells's include *The Island of Doctor Moreau* (1896), *The Invisible Man* (1897), and *The War of the Worlds* (1898).

# Style

## Narrator

The narrator is a speaker through whom the author tells a story. This influences the story's point of view. Wells constructs an ingenious frame for *The Time Machine*, using, in essence, two narrators. The first is the "true" narrator, Hillyer, who introduces the Time Traveller and the other guests present at his house in the first two chapters, and who writes the concluding words in the epilogue. The second narrator is the Time Traveller himself, who takes over the narration, beginning with the third chapter, and who disappears into the future at the end of the twelfth chapter. This narrative technique allows Wells to speculate about the future and at the same time voice his positions on topics such as politics and evolution through the voice of others and within the framework of an adventure story. This strategy makes potentially difficult ideas accessible to more readers. It also gives credibility to the Time Traveller's story, as Hillyer presents the story in the Time Traveller's own words.

## Symbolism

Symbols are things or ideas that stand for other things or ideas. The relationship, however, is not one to one but one to many. Wells uses symbols to evoke ideas and emotions and to figuratively stitch together many of the story's themes. For example, the Palace of Green Porcelain, a museum containing artifacts from England of the 1890s, signifies the idea of home, civilization, and extinction—all at once—for the Time Traveller. Other major symbols are the White Sphinx, which evokes the spiritual degradation of the EloiMorlock society, and the time machine itself, symbolizing Victorian progress and the promise—and the danger—of technology.

## Historical Context

*The Time Machine* had numerous incarnations, the first of which was a story called "The Chronic Argonauts," which Wells published in *Science Schools Journal* in 1888. The story achieved its final form in 1894. An adherent of evolutionary theory and a staunch advocate of women's suffrage and workers' rights, Wells was deeply influenced by his times. In the 1880s and 1890s, Britain's population was booming, roughly doubling between 1851 and 1901. The rise of industrialization was emptying the farms of residents and rural laborers, as people flocked to the cities and industrial towns to work in factories. By the turn of the century, more than eighty percent of Britain's population lived in urban areas. The shift from an agricultural to an industrial economy meant that England was now dependent on imports to feed its growing population and that the landed gentry who relied on income from renting farmland now had to find another way to make money. As a city dweller and a Progressive, Wells was sensitive to the working conditions of the factory laborer. His description of the Eloi and the Morlocks dramatizes the exploitative relationship between owners and workers in Victorian England.

Wells's time machine itself was a product of an imagination nursed on the extraordinary technological advances of his day, advances that fueled industrial development and changed the complexion of the workforce. In the 1870s, for example, both the typewriter and the telephone were invented. These inventions enabled office work to be done more efficiently, work that fell overwhelmingly to women. Other inventions that altered the daily lives and thinking of Victorians include suspension bridges, the telegraph, subway trains, steamships, buses, automobiles, and electric lights. These inventions made traveling places and moving goods less expensive and opened up vistas of opportunity for entrepreneur and worker alike. Public transportation enabled workers to live farther away from urban centers, which were becoming increasingly crowded, unsafe, and unsanitary. These inventions also sped up the pace of daily life, giving it a kind of urgency previously unknown and adding to the sense that the world was spinning out of control.

England celebrated its domestic progress in 1887 with Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee and its world empire in 1897 with its Diamond Jubilee. By the late nineteenth century, England controlled a sizeable portion of the world's land, including India, large swaths of Africa and China, Australia, and Canada. Some were outright colonies, while others held "dominion" status. The British rationalized their imperialist policies, in part, not by claiming that their acquisitions were in the military or economic interest of the country (which they were) but by claiming it was their duty as the superior race to "civilize" primitive peoples who were incapable of governing themselves. Rudyard Kipling referred to this duty as "the white man's burden." British Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli used Darwin's theories to support his claims for racial superiority. However, just as Britain's empire was at its peak, it began to crumble from within, as trying to contain nationalist movements spreading throughout the colonies drained Britain economically and politically.



## Critical Overview

Although it sold relatively well when first published, *The Time Machine* was not widely reviewed. When it was, reviewers often likened it to Jules Verne's adventure stories or Robert Louis Stevenson's *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. Over the last century, it has developed a reputation as a science fiction classic. Writers like Isaac Asimov, himself a celebrated writer of science fiction, have praised the novel, noting that Wells "had the trick . . . of explaining the impossible with just the right amount of gravity . . . to induce the reader to follow along joyously." V. S. Pritchett was even more effusive in his praise, claiming in his essay "The Scientific Romances," "Without question *The Time Machine* is the best piece of writing. It will take its place among the great stories of our language." Bernard Bergonzi, a Wells scholar who has introduced thousands of new readers to Wells in his books and essays, argues in his essay, "*The Time Machine*: An Ironic Myth," that the novel has more "romance" than science, and is closer to the romances of nineteenth-century American writers such as Herman Melville and Nathaniel Hawthorne than it is to the work of Verne. Robert M. Philmus examines the novel for its capacity to satirize various "present ideals." In his essay "The Logic of 'Prophecy' in *The Time Machine*," Philmus reviews a number of articles written about *The Time Machine* before concluding that the Time Traveller's return to the future at the end of the story "reinforces the fiction's claim to integrity." Other critics focus on the novel's action and its ability to entertain. For example, Richard Hauer Costa, author of *H.G. Wells*, a study of Wells's writing and life, calls the novel "a thrilling story of cosmic adventure."

# Criticism

- Critical Essay #1



# Critical Essay #1

*Semansky is an instructor of English literature and composition and writes on literature and culture for several publications. In this essay, Semansky considers the idea of progress in Wells's novel.*

The late nineteenth century was a time when many people believed that progress, especially technological progress, could solve many of humanity's seemingly intractable problems, such as disease, hunger, violence, and exploitation. Wells, a devotee of science, seemingly endorses this view at the beginning of *The Time Machine*, as the Time Traveller, an inventor, creates a machine that travels in the fourth dimension. However, as the story continues, readers see that the Time Traveller discovers a future in which the only thing that has progressed is humanity's savagery and thirst for self-destruction.

The idea of progress emerged contemporaneously with the formation of the sciences and professional scientists and was significantly spurred by the publication of Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* in 1859. Although the notion of evolution was heavily debated before Darwin, Christian beliefs about the creation of the universe held sway in the popular imagination. Holding fast to the Genesis-inspired version of the origins of humanity, the church opposed many ideas of progress put forth by natural historians and scientists because they did not coincide with the church's literal interpretation of the Bible. Such opposition also rationalized the inequality of classes, as humanity was seen as the object, rather than the subject, of change, and people were encouraged to accept their lot in life. Darwin's theory of natural selection and Marx's description of history as a class struggle gave many people a new conceptual framework within which to think about change and, more specifically, to view change as progress. They saw in both Darwin and Marx's theories the idea that humankind was improving with time, that its intellect was becoming more sophisticated, and that a classless society was inevitable. Wells, however, did not equate progress with improvement, and the discoveries of the Time Traveller illustrate his belief that evolution does not necessarily mean evolution of morality or of the intellect. Wells's son and literary critic, Anthony West, sums up the writer's thinking on this subject in his essay "H.G. Wells":

Wells suggests that morals and ethics have their basis in man's behavior as a social animal.... The intellect on the other hand is amoral and ultimately recognizes the single value of efficiency, so that a continuation of the line of development that had made man a reasoning animal might ultimately make him more callous, indifferent, and cruel, not more moral.

The Time Traveller's initial response after landing in the future but prior to meeting the Eloi, underscores this thinking. He worries: "What if cruelty had grown into a common passion? What if in this interval the race had lost its manliness, and had developed into something inhuman, unsympathetic, and overwhelmingly powerful?" His fears partially come true after meeting the creatures, for they have grown weak from not having to work or endure hardship, and since they had all the comforts of the good life provided for



them, they had lost the impetus to strive. But the Time Traveller sees this "ruinous splendor" as a kind of paradise, where "One triumph of a united humanity over Nature had followed another." This paradise, however, is not a cause of celebration but a reason for mourning. After learning of the Morlocks' existence, the Time Traveller speculates on what had come to pass:

I grieved at how brief the dream of human intellect had been. It had committed suicide. It had set itself steadfastly toward comfort and ease, a balanced society with security and permanency as its watchword. It had attained its hopes—to come to this at last. . . . The rich had been assured of his wealth and comfort, the toiler assured of his life and work.

Wells's depiction of the relationship between the Eloi and the Morlocks can be seen as a critique of the notion that "work" was a problem to be solved, rather than a necessary condition of humanity essential for the intellect to develop. Before Marx drew closer attention to the horrific working conditions of laborers, locating their misery in the historic struggle between capital and labor in writings such as *The Communist Manifesto* (1848), workers were largely resigned to their fate. In *The Annals of Labour: Autobiographies of British Working Class People, 1820-1920*, historian John Burnett sums up their attitude as follows:

There is a sense of patient resignation to the facts of life, the feeling that human existence is a struggle and that survival is an end in itself. Especially is this so in relation to the early death of wives or children—a fatalistic attitude that 'God gives and God takes away,' and that although one may mourn, one does not inveigh against the Fates which, to us, seem to have treated some so cruelly.

The working class would receive their reward not in this life but in the next. They waited for salvation, not progress, enduring hardship and suffering in their daily lives in the hope of securing a better one after they died. History was merely how one waited for the return of Christ. Wells mocks the Christian notion that life's purpose is to wait for salvation in his image of the winged sphinx, one of the first things the Time Traveller sees after "landing." The Sphinx of Giza, Egypt, has the body of a lion and the head of a king or god and is a symbol of strength and wisdom. By putting wings on it, Wells creates a kind of hybrid angel. Instead of representing God's messengers, however, the statue signifies a degraded civilization on the verge of extinction.

Marx had a different idea of salvation. An atheist who argued that history was evolving towards a classless society in which wealth would be distributed equally, Marx offered hope for millions of people who toiled in factories for low wages, but he also instilled fear in capitalists who benefited from the labor of the working poor. Ironically, Wells, an occasional socialist, parodies communism in the Time Traveller's description of the Eloi, as what he initially sees as the perfect communist society turns out to be little more than an updated and more perverted story of the haves and the have-nots from his own time. Humanity's mistake, Wells implies in the novel, is in believing that through science and technology they had conquered nature. Nature, for Wells, was a stronger force than society, one that could not be subjugated. Overriding Wells's belief in the moral





rightness of socialism was his belief that, ultimately, humankind could not contend with the force of nature. The Time Traveller spells this out when he muses on the Eloi:

I thought of the physical slightness of the people, their lack of intelligence . . . and it strengthened my belief in the perfect conquest of Nature. For after the battle comes Quiet. Humanity has been strong, energetic, and intelligent, and has used all its abundant vitality to alter the conditions under which it lived. And now came the reaction of the altered conditions.

The "reaction," nature's revenge, came in the form of the evolution of two races of "people," neither of which had any exemplary moral traits. By locating progress as a provisional phenomenon contingent upon humanity's capacity to make moral choices, rather than as the purpose of history or evolution, Wells calls attention to the necessity for humankind to change its ways carefully, and with the future in mind. More than a science fiction story or a fantasy tale, *The Time Machine* is a cautionary tale of what may happen if unfettered capitalism is permitted to continue. By making a machine the thing that literally enables time travel, Wells was appealing to the increasing fascination Westerners of the late nineteenth century had for the new and the mechanical. Electricity, steamships, the radio and telephone, and numerous other technological inventions were changing the shape of what was thought possible and, Wells would say, blinding many to their very human responsibilities to use these inventions for the betterment of all rather than for the profit of a few.

**Source:** Chris Semansky, Critical Essay on *The Time Machine*, in *Novels for Students*, The Gale Group, 2003.

# Adaptations

*The Time Machine* has been adapted into film three times. Its first adaptation was released in 1960. Directed by George Pal and starring Rod Taylor, Alan Young, and Yvette Mimieux, this version could be considered the best of the three. The second adaptation, released in 1978, was directed by Henning Schellerup and stars John Beck, Priscilla Barnes, and Andrew Duggan. The most recent adaptation, released in 2002, stars Guy Pearce and Jeremy Irons and is directed by Simon Wells. All three films are widely available in libraries and major video stores.

In 1997, Simon & Schuster Audioworks released an audiocassette of Star Trek star Leonard Nimoy reading *The Time Traveller* as part of its Alien Voices Presents Series.



## Topics for Further Study

In groups, draw a timeline with pictures of the evolution of human beings, beginning with prosimians and ending with the large crab-like creatures the Time Traveller encounters towards the end of his adventure. Be sure to include the Morlocks and the Eloi. Present your timeline to the class, and discuss how your timeline of human evolution differs from that of other groups.

Assume the Time Traveller returns after three years. Write the thirteenth chapter, speculating on the kind of evidence he presents to the narrator about his travels.

Wells believed that the human race was destined to destroy itself. In class, discuss the possibility of Wells's belief. How might what he said more than a hundred years ago come to pass in your own life or the near future?

In *The Time Machine*, humanity "evolved" into the Morlocks and the Eloi, each representing a class of people. In groups, discuss other possible ways humanity might evolve in the future, and report your speculations to the class.

Write a short essay identifying a specific time in the past to which you would like to return, and present reasons for your choice.

Mark Twain's 1889 novel *A Connecticut Yankee at King Arthur's Court* was the first novel to deal with time travel. However, the hero of that novel has no control over his journeys through time. Compare Wells's novel with Twain's, paying particular attention to the ways in which each uses time travel to satirize popular thinking and public policies. Discuss your comparisons in class.

Wells's novel has remained popular more than one hundred years after its initial publication. What do you think accounts for its popularity? Be specific with your responses, and discuss as a class.

The Morlocks represent the devolution of the working class of Wells's day. Many modern and contemporary representations of working class people in film and literature represent them as heroic, yet Wells's demonizes them. In a short essay, account for this choice.

# Compare and Contrast

**1890s:** Numerous countries are at war over disputed territory, including China and Japan, the United States and Spain, Turkey and Greece.

**Today:** Numerous countries and people feud over disputed territory, including the Palestinians and Israelis and the Pakistanis, and Indians.

**Today:** In 2002, Stephen Jay Gould, perhaps the twentieth century's most prominent proponent of evolutionary theory, dies.

**1890s:** Wilhelm Roentgen discovers x-rays and Marconi invents radio telegraphy, both of which dramatically change the way people live in the twentieth century.

## What Do I Read Next?

Charles Darwin's 1859 groundbreaking study of humanity's beginnings, *On the Origin of Species by Natural Selection*, had a profound impact on Wells's intellectual development.

Like Wells, William Gibson is a science fiction writer. Gibson, however, is interested in the interface between human beings and machines, rather than human beings and animals. His blockbuster novel *Neuromancer* (1984) helped to establish the genre of Cyberpunk literature.

T. H. Huxley was perhaps the largest single influence on Wells's career as a writer and thinker. Adrian Desmond's biography *Huxley: From Devil's Disciple to Evolution's High Priest* (1997) examines Huxley's role in popularizing Darwin's theory of evolution and in legitimizing science in nineteenth-century Britain.

Mark Twain's novel *A Connecticut Yankee at King Arthur's Court* (1889) is the first novel to explicitly use time travel in its plot.

Wells's novel *The Island of Doctor Moreau: A Possibility* (1896), about an island stocked with hybrids of animals and human beings from scientific experiments gone bad, remains one of Wells's more popular works and is particularly relevant today.



## Topics for Discussion

1. At the beginning of the story, how does the time traveller explain what happens to the demonstration model of his time machine? How does this fit in with his explanation of the "fourth dimension"?
2. What is the major danger the traveller faces when he decides to stop the machine? How does this fit in with his explanation of the "fourth dimension"?
3. How does Wells convey a sense of changing time in his description of the time traveller's transition through more than 800,000 years?
4. How does the traveller try to assure himself that he will not be left stranded in the world of the future? What happens that almost cancels out this protective action?
5. What does the traveller first think the Sphinx represents? What does he later learn about the significance of the Sphinx and of the many well-like openings he sees throughout the countryside?
6. How does Wells use the traveller's visit to the Palace of Green Porcelain to broaden the view of changes in human society?
7. There are two levels of time in the traveller's trip: the time that his adventure in the future covers and the length of time that passes in the 1895 setting.  
  
How long does the traveller remain in the year 802,701? How much time elapses from the time he mounts the machine until he arrives at the dinner party?
8. Under what circumstances does the traveller obtain the flowers that are in his pocket upon his return? Why does the narrator consider these flowers a sign of hope for the future?
9. What does Wells accomplish by extending his picture thirty million years into the future? Is the story stronger or weaker by this addition? Why?
10. When the traveller leaves on the time machine for his final trip, is there any indication that he ever plans to come back? What additional provisions does he take on this second trip?



## Ideas for Reports and Papers

1. Consider the physical aspects of Wells's world of A.D. 802,701. Describe the land surface, waterways, climate, plants and animals, natural resources, and inhabitants as objectively as possible, as if you were writing an atlas entry about England at this time.
2. Read carefully the section describing the traveller's return. Describe the traveller's appearance and explain what caused his injuries, dirt, and disordered clothing.
3. The traveller frequently philosophizes during his narrative, sometimes correcting earlier interpretations. Explain how he first accounts for the humanity he sees in the Eloi. How does he modify this view after he has become aware of the nature of the Morlocks?
4. The Eloi are not presented as truly human, but they would not be able to evoke pity in the reader if they did not have some touches of humanity. Explain the characteristics that make them different from humans of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, comparing these alien characteristics with their more human traits.
5. One of the essential elements of science fiction is that it uses scientific or scientifically plausible principles in order to create a sense of verisimilitude.

Explain how Wells uses science or pseudo-science to make the story of the time traveller seem credible.

## Literary Precedents

The wondrous adventure tale is a fundamental part of the Western literary tradition. The earliest literary works known are tales of mythic magic and wondrous events. In the Sumerian Epic of Gilgamesh (c. 2000 B.C.), the adventures are part of a quest. In the Odyssey (c.1050-850 B.C.), they are part of a lost warrior's wanderings. The Time Machine presents a great traveler's journeys, from the 1890s all the way to the end of the world.

The Time Traveller is also for a time stranded in the land of the Eloi after the Morlocks take his time machine.

This has been a popular convention of fiction since the publication of Daniel Defoe's Robinson Crusoe (1719). In The Time Machine, the convention forces the Time Traveller to make some difficult choices between Eloi and Morlock, between courage and cowardice.

The Time Machine is also an important "seminal" work. That is, it sets two important precedents that subsequent authors follow. The first precedent is that of the time machine. It enables someone to voyage back and forth to past and future. The time travel story has become commonplace in science fiction and a time-travel device is a staple of the genre.

The other significant precedent is the concept of "time" as the "fourth dimension": "'Clearly,' the Time Traveller proceeded, 'any real body must have extension in four directions: it must have Length, Breadth, Thickness and Duration.'" Wells's reasoning may not withstand close scrutiny, but Albert Einstein was later to characterize "time" as the fourth dimension. Wells's describing the universe in four terms — Length, Breadth, Thickness, and Duration — has inspired a multitude of fictional adventures through both time and space. The television show Dr.

Who's Tardis, for instance, is a time machine that may wander through millions of years and millions of lightyears in any single journey.





## Further Study

Bergonzi, Bernard, *The Early H. G. Wells: A Study of the Scientific Romances*, Manchester University Press, 1961.

Bergonzi played a large part in establishing Wells's reputation as a great science fiction writer, arguing that Wells's scientific romances such as *The Time Machine*, *The Island of Doctor Moreau*, *The Invisible Man*, and *The War of the Worlds* are classics of the English language.

Coren, Michael, *The Invisible Man: The Life and Liberties of H. G. Wells*, Atheneum, 1993.

Coren explores the contradictions of Wells's life, claiming that although Wells championed women's suffrage, he was also a misogynist and that although he was sympathetic to the plight of the Jews, he held anti-Semitic views.

Huntington, John, *The Logic of Fantasy: H. G. Wells and Science Fiction*, Columbia University Press, 1982.

Huntington examines the relationship between Wells's writing and the genre of science fiction and considers how Wells contributed to the emerging form.

MacKenzie, Norman, and Jean MacKenzie, *The Time Traveller: Life of H. G. Wells*, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1973.

The MacKenzies provide a relatively straightforward and uncontroversial account of Wells's life in this accessible biography.



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## **Introduction**

### **Purpose of the Book**

The purpose of Novels for Students (NfS) 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, NfS 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 NfS 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 NfS 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 NfS 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 NfS 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

NfS 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 Novels 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 NfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the NfS 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 Novels for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Novels 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 NfS 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.□ Novels for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

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

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Novels 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 NfS, 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 Novels 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 NfS, 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 Novels 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](mailto:ForStudentsEditors@gale.com). Or write to the editor at:

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