Herbert George Wells was an English writer, prolific in many genre who wrote dozens of novels, short stories, and works of social commentary, history, satire, biography, and autobiography, and even including two books on recreational war games. He is now best remembered for his science fiction novels and is often called the "father of science fiction"***.*** *The Time Machine* is the first of a series of early novels by Wells that profoundly influenced later science fiction. These “scientific romances,” as Wells called them, include *The Island of Doctor Moreau* (1896), *The Invisible Man: A Grotesque Romance* (1897), and *The War of the Worlds* (1898). In these works, Wells powerfully expresses many of the anxieties of his time. The work is generally credited with the popularization of the concept of [time travel](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Time_travel) by using a vehicle or device to travel purposely and selectively forward or backward through time. The term "time machine", coined by Wells, is now almost universally used to refer to such a vehicle or device. Wells had considered the notion of time travel before, in a short story titled "The Chronic Argonauts”. This work, published in his college newspaper, was the foundation for *The Time Machine*. It is a simple narrative with so many complex ideas and like a good novel it includes an element of fantasy and stimulates ideas in the audience that they never came to realize before. 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."

The Time Machine  published in 1895 is written as a frame narrative. The outer narrator, Hillyer, briefly sets the scene for he concludes the narrative with a description of the disappearance of the Time Traveler and offers a brief speculative epilogue. The novel opens with [the Time Traveller](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-time-machine/characters/the-time-traveller) explaining to his dinner guests the underlying scientific principles that make his invention, the time machine, possible. This immersion into mathematical concepts and scientific language is meant to give readers a taste of the intelligence, creativity, and ambition that fuel technological development. This science fiction also revels that the Victorian era could be the technological pinnacle of humankind, followed by a deterioration of the technological and cultural progress that many people expect to continue indefinitely into the future.

"The Time Machine" is primarily a social critique of H.G.Wells's Victorian England projected into the distant future. Wells was a Socialist for most of his life with Communist ideology, and he argued in his works that capitalism was one of the great ills of modern society. Rapid growth in technology, education, and capital had launched the Industrial Revolution in the 17th- and 18th-centuries, and by the late 19th-century of England was a leading force in the new economy: while industrialists grew in their unbounded wealth, thousands of men, women, and young children worked hard for long hours for small wages in dirty, smoke-filled factories. Wells chose a number of scientific ideas in his argument against capitalism.

In "The Time Machine," Wells shows how far human evolution will go if capitalism continues. Mankind will split into two distinct species, the ruling class (the Eloi in the novel) and the working class (the Morlocks). Furthermore, the advancements of civilization will not necessarily advance the species. Their luxurious, carefree civilization has made the beautiful Eloi the weak, lazy, and stupid targets of the Morlocks; without an urgent need to survive. The Eloi have not needed to become more "fit," but have instead fallen. Therefore, even though man may evolve to adapt to his environment, the changing environment itself may make that evolution ultimately undesirable. Wells's portrayal of the Eloi serves as an ominous warning to the ruling class who believes it is striving towards perfection. Through this he has also countered the notion of evolution as perfection.

Wells’s main point is that true progress is impossible when society is divided rigidly by class. In an ironic reversal, the Eloi, who represent the rich and who used to oppress the poor, are now themselves literally destroyed by their former victims. They also represent numerous people in society who lack certain skills that they need for survival. When he arrived in the future, The Time Traveller, after seeing and hearing the Eloi, concluded that they had an extremely low intelligence compared to the people that lived in his time. 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 aggravated. His journeys even deeper into the future revealed a world in which they were often described as and compared to little children.

“Then one of them asked me a question that showed him to be on the intellectual level of one of our five year old children.”

*The Time Machine* capitalized on the public's hunger for technology and the promise that technology offered. However, the humanity had been extinguished from the face of the earth.

The very structure of the narrative of *The Time Machine* is also reflective of the theme of inequality. [The Time Traveller](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-time-machine/characters/the-time-traveller) recounts his journey into the future to a room full of social elites (an editor, doctor, journalist, psychologist, etc.), both because these are his friends and also because they are the people who have power to effect change in British society, and the Time Traveller expects his account to be impactful. While the Time Traveller is a respected scientist, he seems not quite at home in these circles: the others view him as an eccentric and he’s uncomfortable with servants (he “hates to have [them] waiting at dinner”). So the Time Traveller occupies a complicated class position that, perhaps, makes him uniquely suited to reflect on the class distinctions he encounters in the future. It’s also notable that, in Wells’ vision, even the Time Traveller’s movement hundreds of thousands of years in the future does not allow him to transcend his class. The Time Traveller is more at home with the Eloi than the Morlocks, just as he was socializing with elites in Victorian England. The science fiction world of 802,701 then, is a dystopian projection into the future based on inequality between Victorian social classes, but it is also simply an exaggeration for emphasis of the social conditions that were contemporary with Wells’ writing.

Darwin and Marx's theories the idea that humankind was improving with time and that a classless society was inevitable. Wells, however, did not believe in the same theory 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.”

Although The Time Machine has the force of a realistic work, it often is read as a parable. Most critics agree that it is one of the small number of masterpieces in the field of science fiction.V. S. Pritchett in his essay "The Scientific Romances," praises the novel by saying, "Without question The Time Machine is the best piece of writing. It will take its place among the great stories of our language." On the other hand, Bernard Bergonzi, argues in his essay, "The Time Machine: An Ironic Myth," that the novel has more "romance" than science”