
| RESEARCH ARTICLE

Atmospheric Effects of Strange White Flowers: A Corpus Stylistic Approach to the Text World in *The Time Machine*

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| ABSTRACT

Previous research on plants in *The Time Machine* has shown the importance of putting these peripheral objects to the core. Studies have indicated potential associations between corpus stylistics and cognitive stylistics, but investigations of *The Time Machine* have not dealt with the "strange white flowers" in much detail, especially observing from a corpus perspective and interpreting from the cognitive one. The principal objective of this study is to explore the atmospheric effects of these flowers with a combined corpus and cognitive methodological approach. Corpus techniques rely on the tools of Sketch Engine and CQPweb, while cognitive methods lie in the theories of Atmosphere and the Text World. The results showed that "strange white flowers" at the macro-level create elusive and diffusive atmospheric effects of transiency and strangeness, which could be represented at the meso-level by the text-world presentation and explored at the micro-level by collocation and colligation. The findings can contribute to a better understanding of peripheral objects in *The Time Machine* and add new insight into the study of science fiction.

| KEYWORDS

The Time Machine, corpus stylistics, Text World, atmosphere, strange white flowers

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1. Introduction

The Time Machine (TTM) is one of the greatest science novels in history. Previous studies have addressed the underlying conflicts by comparing Eloi and Morlocks, but the roles of plants in TTM, those "strange white flowers" in particular, have been left largely unaddressed. Recently, Bowden (2019) set out to explain various plants in TTM from the perspective of contemporary horticulture to bring a fresh interpretation to the novel. For Bowden (ibid, p.1), those flowers in TTM achieve some "human-engineered flora," implicating human-plant interaction and their competition for narrative attention. Generally speaking, it is the main characters that draw the attention of the narrator and narratee. But this is not the whole picture if taking other peripheral objects, such as "strange white flowers", into discussion and detecting them with corpus study to search their unique use of high frequency.

Contemporary stylistics has witnessed a burgeoning interest in integrating corpus stylistics with cognitive stylistics (Gibbons & Whiteley, 2018). Current research, however, failed to examine the atmospheric effects of those flowers with the same cognitive theory of Text World. This study, to begin with, attempts to take a micro-level analysis of the flowers with corpus toolkits and explore at the meso-level by the text-world presentation, and finally summarize at the macro-level the general atmospheric effects of these flowers.

2. Literature Review

In an investigation into the atmosphere, Stockwell (2014a) found that atmospheric writing in literature could engage the reader in the ambient feeling of the fictional world denoted (2014a, p.361), and the research into atmosphere ask for "a more cognitive poetic account" (ibid, p.362). Therefore, Stockwell (2014a, 2014b) not only made a distinction between atmosphere and tone, collectively known as ambience but further pointed out that ambience embodies the "cognitive effect of cumulative but diffused

associations across discourse" (2014a, p.366). Concerning this claim, if we want to study the atmospheric effects of some objects in the literature, we aim to find out the latent evocative, accumulative yet diffused, everlasting effects.

The study of the atmosphere gained insights from reference points and dominion. Langacker (2008, as cited in Stockwell, 2014a, p.367) manifested that a specific reference point serves as potential access to various targets, all together constituting the reference point's dominion. To validate the notion of ambience, Stockwell (ibid, p. 368), citing Hoey' (2005, 2013) definition of lexical priming, shows that the atmospheric effect could be probed within corpus linguistics for the close connection between lexical priming and dominion effects. It means that if we take some objects as the reference point, related collocations can be activated.

A large number of published studies (Gavins, 2007; Gibbo & Whiteley, 2018; Harrison, 2017; Stockwell, 2002, and others) have applied Text World Theory to regard reading as a mental space by digging into the fictional world constructed. The theory is composed of world-builders, including time, location, entities and objects, and function-advancers, involving the processes within the transitivity that help to advance the plot. According to Harrison (2017, p.28), the text world construction could draw upon cognitive grammar's reference point and scanning processes. The former is close to the core of the atmospheric analysis mentioned above, while the latter is in line with Nuttall's (2014, p.27) statements to apply sequential scanning into the text-world discussion. The scanning processes with the above lexical priming together can be studied by corpus methods through collocation, colligation, and concordance.

To investigate the atmospheric effect, which is a kind of diffused sense over the course, Stockwell (2014a, p.373) suggested that it could be examined both via corpus stylistics and cognitive poetics, especially in corpus linguistics, it is possible to locate reference point words through concordance lines to identify their peripheral uses (ibid, 2014b, p.31). As a result, it is possible to tie cognitive poetic theories of atmosphere and the Text World with the corpus study. The combination will solve the problem of corpus stylistics which merely count linguistic patterns while providing more details than short concordance lines to enrich the literary interpretation (Stubbs, 2014, p.51; McIntyre & Walker, 2019, p.18).

Text-world construction relies on the text itself. Though the atmosphere effects have the features of diffused quality, they are super-textual, not sub-textual (Stockwell, 2014a, p.373). Harrison (2017, p.113) has cited Langacker's (1987) three facets to decode the holistic conceptualization of a narrative, which are "analyzable (micro-), component (meso-) and composite (macro-) linguistic structures". From this viewpoint, it turns out that the atmospheric effect can firstly be viewed at the micro-level by the concrete collocation and colligation. Secondly, it can be researched at the meso-level based on the text world, which is to conceptualize specific objects and components, and finally, overviewed at the macro-level of the general accumulative and diffusive effects beyond context with a combined display of the other two analyses.

As for the study of TTM, prior studies have discussed a lot about class confusion and division revealed in the topic of the novel, viewed in Collinge, 2017; Rieder, 2009; and Partington, 2002 and others. Contrary to formerly published studies, Bowden (2019) recently took a new perspective to study the Well's plant plot and pointed out that the Time Traveller's flowers imply an uncovered aspect of Well's text (ibid, p.1). Undoubtedly, plants in TTM, compared with the main characters in the novel, have not received enough attention and are put into secondary place. Specifically, there has been no detailed investigation of "strange white flowers" in TTM, which have their unique atmospheric effects through the narration. Therefore, this study will target the "strange white flowers".

In summary, it has been shown from this review that there is a relationship between corpus stylistics and cognitive stylistics given the study of atmospheric effects, and there is also a possibility to include the research into text-world analysis to provide more contextual information. Since previous studies failed to dig into the atmospheric effects of "strange white flowers" in TTM, this study seeks to explore it with a combined method to add new insights into the study of science fiction of H.G.Wells.

3. Methodology

TTM is available on Project Gutenberg, which provides free eBooks with expired U.S. copyright. The book contains twelve chapters and an epilogue. For the convenience of tracing back to the concrete context of each finding, the book was divided into thirteen TXT files and compiled into a small corpus of 32,428 words and 37,561 tokens via Sketch Engine, a practical online corpus analyzing tool. But the size slightly differs in another available online analyzing tool CQPweb, with the tokens of 37,579, after the corpus installation. Before compiling, the author scratched out all the superscripts marking annotations to clean the data.

Researchers could use different analytical toolkits on Sketch Engine and CQPweb. This study mainly uses the Keywords toolkit of Sketch Engine to extract terminology, referencing its pre-equipped British National Corpus (BNC), and applies the Wordlist toolkit to check the frequently-used words in various parts of speech. Next, collocation and colligation are studied based on the semantic tag of USAS (UCREL Semantic Analysis System) provided by CQPweb. Finally, it views the contexts in use by concordance.

The concrete analyzing procedures are as follows: First and foremost, based on a corpus-driven approach and with the flower as the core, the study tends to find out some opposite pairs with sharp contrasts to see the class conflicts underlying the theme, enhancing readers' understanding of the discourse world behind TTM. Next, since the word white ranks high in the adjective frequency list, other nouns modified by white will be discussed, especially the White Sphinx, for Sphinx and flowers symbolize respectively uncertainty and transiency in the science novel. To further dig into the colligation of flowers in literature, in the next step, flowers used in the corpus Early English Books Online (V3), EBO for short, will be explored as a reference to compare their usage in TTM. Since the main research target is the strange white flowers, other objects modified by the word "strange" also receive semantic tag analysis given the strangeness presented. Most importantly, the Text World created by flowers in the novel needs to be construed on account of the cognitive poetics to add contextual interpretation for the corpus discoveries. Finally, the Text World analysis with the previous findings counts together to demonstrate the atmospheric effects of flowers in TTM.

4. Results and Discussion

The purpose of this section is to collect data from Sketch Engine, the BNC website, and CQPweb to investigate the keywords and wordlist generated, collocation of white sphinx and white flowers, and colligation of other "adj. + flowers" in TTM. Then, it is further extended to an interpretation of concordance and its broader context with the text-world analysis of the passage of "strange white flowers", with the elaboration of atmospheric effects as an end.

4.1 Keywords and Wordlist: Finding opposite pairs – contrasts and conflicts

Keywords usually are the starting points of corpus stylistics, for they contextualize the research by providing background information, whereas wordlist concerns the frequency to highlight words that stand out. This section takes the wordlist of adjectives as the objects in that it sets out to probe into the "strange white flowers."

reference corpus: British National Corpus (BNC) (Items: 3,766)

Word	Frequency	Frequency per million	Score ?
1 weena	54	1,437.66	1,438.7 ***
2 morlocks	35	931.82	932.8 ***
3 filby	17	452.60	453.6 ***
4 morlock	15	399.35	400.4 ***
5 sphinx	22	585.71	319.4 ***
6 camphor	11	292.86	240.4 ***
7 under-world	8	212.99	214.0 ***
8 eloi	8	212.99	208.4 ***
9 hill-side	6	159.74	152.6 ***
10 upper-world	5	133.12	128.4 ***

Figure 1. Top ten keywords in TTM.

adjective (857 items | 2,613 total frequency)

Lemma	Frequency ? ↓	Frequency Per Million ? ↓
1 little	104	2,768.83 ***
2 last	45	1,198.05 ***
3 great	45	1,198.05 ***
4 white	43	1,144.80 ***
5 same	37	985.06 ***
6 other	36	958.44 ***
7 own	34	905.19 ***
8 first	34	905.19 ***
9 strange	33	878.57 ***
10 black	27	718.83 ***

Figure 2. Top ten adjectives in TTM.

Mastropiero (2018, p.97) sorted the keywords into fictional world signal, thematic signal, and unclassified keywords. Keywords of fictional world signal contain *Characters, Setting & props, Temporal indicators, and Atmosphere*. Among the top ten keywords in TTM, characters, Weena, Morlock(s), Eloi, and the settings, udder-world, and upper-world are the focus of the study of this section. Moreover, the thematic signal, the Sphinx, will be discussed in the next section. Though no keywords of atmosphere appear in the list, we could research the atmospheric effects of "strange white flowers" as a replacement.

In fact, "flowers" are not within the frequency list of nouns, but the reason to choose "strange white flowers" as the object is that both adjectives of strange and white are within the frequency list of adjectives. Therefore, it is an underlying connection revealed by corpus-driven observation. It proves from the side that plants are at the peripheral position in the TTM. Accordingly, if we regard them as equally significant as those characters, we could add new insights into the understanding of the novel, as shown in the previous study (Bowden, 2019).

Take a closer view at Figures 1 and 2, pairs of opposition uncovered, for example, Morlocks and Eloi, under-world and upper-world, little and great, white and black, last and first. As reviewed before, these stylistic contrasts accord with the latent class division and social conflicts between labourers and capitalists. Collinge (2017) compared the relationship between Eloi and Morlocks as that of rabbit and poacher, which is a satire that capitalist masters reversed into the slaves, yet it is even weirder when

it comes to fourth "a grotesque natural symbiosis" (Rieder, 2009, p.25). It affirms the "flaw in the utopia", which is a static one of the TTM noted by Partington (2002, p.59) since the society has degenerated into stagnation and rigidity, for individuals lack initiative as Eloi deteriorated physically and mentally (ibid, p.67).

Since the present study deals with the "strange white flowers", the link between Weena, the keyword ranks first, and the flower needs consideration. These flowers with elusive and diffusive effects penetrating the whole novel were given to the time traveler by Weena. It is elusive because these flowers live in a mysterious garden and might symbolize those beautiful but fragile Eloi as Weena. And the diffusive effect is built on the elusive one, for the flowers were brought back to the present from the future, but the time traveller left them in the present and never returned. Therefore, readers might have a lasting query about whether the traveller will return one day.

4.2 Collocation: White flowers and White Sphinx

White collocates with Sphinx more frequently than with flowers. The Sphinx in ancient Greek stories spoke in riddles. When connected with science, as discussed in Prince (2000, p.543), it is extended to human evolution and the search for the nature of knowledge, namely the epistemology, which corresponds to the description of the epistemological journey imbued with uncertainty in TTM (Pinér, 2016). Nonetheless, the journey is characteristic of the optimism and positivism of that time, which is the belief that the mysterious future world will be unravelled and deciphered with persistence and patience (ibid, p.158).

It is consistent with what has been expounded in the epilogue of TTM:

*"And I have by me, for my comfort, two **strange white flowers** - shrivelled now, and brown and flat and brittle - to witness that even when mind and strength had gone, gratitude and a mutual tenderness still lived on in the heart of man."* (In Epilogue of TTM)

As we can see, the two strange white flowers evoke the feeling of "gratitude and mutual tenderness" that can bring great comfort to people even if "the future is black and blank". And these white flowers are white mallow, symbolizing "tenderness and beneficence in the language of flowers"(Ward, 1999, p.264). Accordingly, the flowers, on the one hand, represent transiency for being fragile and easy to shrivel, and on the other hand, mark the virtue of beneficence and the positivity towards uncertainty.

Though, compared with Jules Verne, who was also a famous writer of science fiction in the 19th century, there is a distinction between Wells' catastrophism and Verne's positivism, as noted by Suvin (1979, p. ix), because Wells' novels are mainly as a vehicle for social criticism and lack the technological stories and fabulous voyages created in Jules Verne's (Wolfe, 2016, p.11-16). But in the epilogue of TTM, it seems that Wells did not completely lose hope for science and technology, for social development and human civilization, as the word gratitude accompanied by those two white flowers was applied here as a sign of positivity and humanity. This could be explained by the two kinds of utopias in TTM and Wells' other novel, *A Modern Utopia*. As elaborated by Partington (2002, p.67), if TTM deals with the static utopia with the potential of falling into rigidity, Wells later, in his *A Modern Utopia*, addressed the kinetic utopia to offer "a methodology for everlasting advancement."

4.3 Colligation: Characteristics of flowers and the strangeness

It has been learned beforehand from the USAS tagset that flower belongs to L3, including terms of plants. The USAS tagset is available on <http://ucrel.lancs.ac.uk/usas/>. A list of L3, therefore, can be generated based on the "Semantic tag" from the "Frequency lists" query of CQPweb. As a result, a total of 142 words share the semantics of plant life in TTM, among which flowers occur 19 times and rank top while the singular flower only appears once, so the plural form is the focus of the current study.

In addition, concerning not enough large science fiction corpus is available for reference and the noun flower distributes second-frequently in the fiction genre (see figure 3), the Early English Books Online (V3), EEBO, is chosen as a reference corpus. Although the EEBO corpus pertains to historical English, it still can be employed to discover flowers used in literary language, so this part is an exploration of the colligation of "adj. + flowers" with high collocation strength in the TTM in comparison with the EEBO.

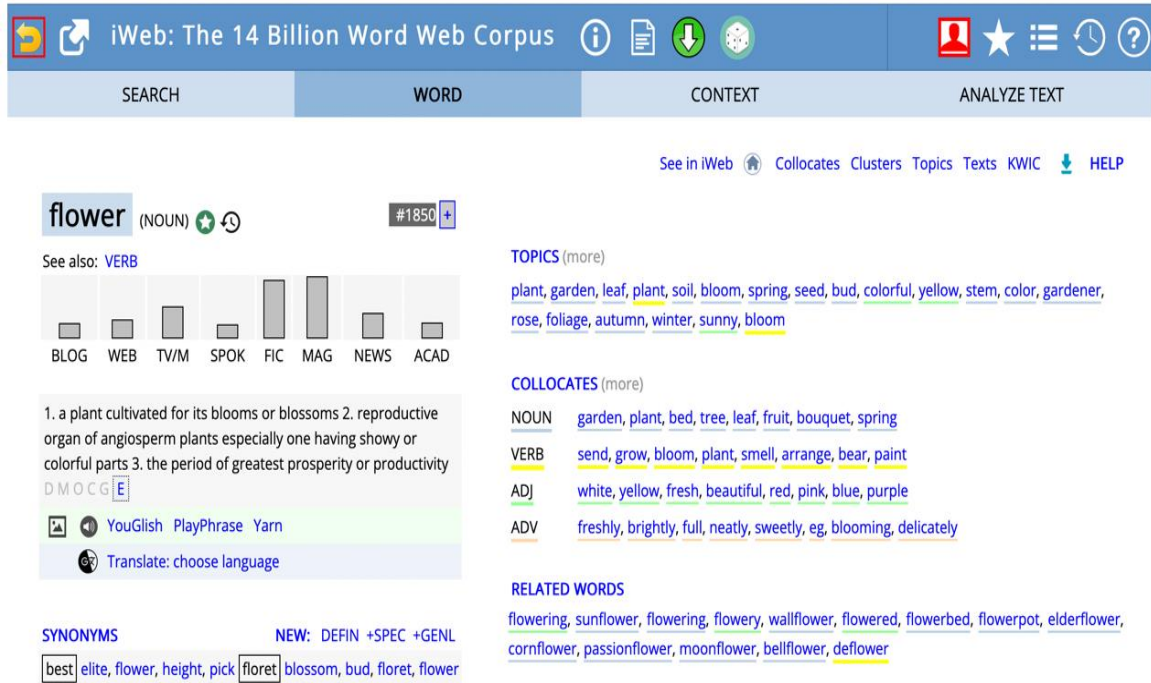


Figure 3. Genre distribution of the noun flower in BNC.

While selecting “Standard query” for the word flowers, we enter the KWIC window, then we can use “Choose action...” and its “Collocation” to add “Semantic tag” into the analysis. The collocation controls were set based on semantic tag, with a collocation distance only from “1 to the left” and frequent at least once to locate adjectives collocate with flowers. Additionally, Mutual Information (MI), a statistical measure for scoring the collocation strength, was chosen to list the most frequently used collocation of diverse semantic tags. Figure 4 and figure 5 share the same criterion.

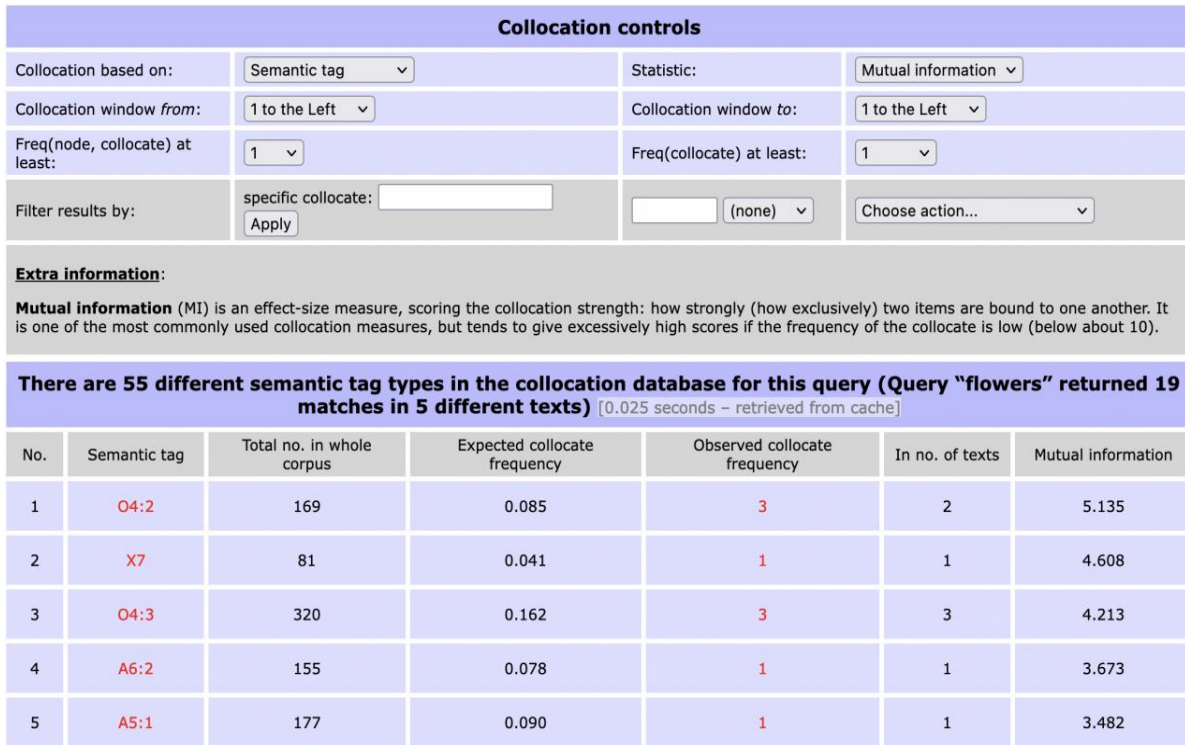


Figure 4. Collocation with “flowers” in TTM based on semantic tags.

There are 212 different semantic tag types in the collocation database for this query (Query "flowers" returned 59,402 matches in 7,479 different texts) [0.745 seconds - retrieved from cache]						
No.	Semantic tag	Total no. in whole corpus	Expected collocate frequency	Observed collocate frequency	In no. of texts	Mutual information
1	X3:5	95,535	4.720	807	575	7.418
2	O4:3	1,156,999	57.168	3,560	528	5.961
3	X3:1	396,130	19.573	979	739	5.644
4	L3	1,437,377	71.022	1,126	304	3.987
5	A6:3	585,982	28.954	371	256	3.680
6	N3:2	1,581,174	78.127	669	119	3.098

Figure 5. Collocation with "flowers" in EEBO based on semantic tags.

Before diving into adjectives modifying flowers, it is supposed that the word flowers collocates with beauty, goodness, colour, and fragrance. The evidence demonstrates in figures 3 to 5. It is normal to find that O4:2, meaning judgement of appearance, e.g., beautiful/delightful/withered flowers, O4:3, depicting colour and other visual attributes, e.g., white flowers, and A5:1, marking evaluation of quality, e.g., wonderful flowers, appear in TTM. X7, which depicts desire, was taken out here, e.g., pick flowers. In EEBO, O4:3 also ranks top, but it is also common to figure that X3.5 represents terms relating to smell, e.g., fragrant flowers, and X3:1 relates to taste, such as sweet flowers. Though A6.2 links with variety, such as sundry flowers, and N3.2 connects to size, e.g., small flowers, these are still close to our general cognition. What is deviated from the usual expression is that "bitter flowers" is found in X3:1 due to some metaphorical use. However, this is not within the discussion.

What makes adjective collocates with flowers in TTM rather unique given semantic tags is that A6:2, demoting anomaly, e.g., strange flowers, is of relatively high collocation strength in TTM. Such collocation of high frequency did not appear in EEBO, "strange flowers," thus, arose a feeling of unusuality and strangeness in the science fiction of TTM.

This finding broadly supports the work of other studies in science fiction linking estrangement, cognition, and the novum together (Patrick, 2006a; Patrick, 2006b; Pinér, 2016; Suvin, 1979). Suvin (1979, p.208) and Patrick (2006b, p37) point out that the novum is about the new thing of "fantastic element" and "the strange property or the strange world," as observed by Wells. In TTM, the phrases constructed by the colligation "strange + n." are essential, involving strange experience and adventure, strange animals and creatures, strange exultation and fascination, strange world, and new world...

The above are typical elements of science fiction, which imbue the fictional world with mysterious fantasy. And the sense of strangeness or estrangement created is owing to the protagonist taking an unexpected journey into the future and encountering a brand-new yet peculiar world. Through cognition, writers of science fiction construe a sense of estrangement out of an imaginative framework instead of the empirical reality (Patrick, 2006b, p.37), so this is "a strange newness" (Suvin, 1979, p.7) and "an alternate reality" (ibid, p.71) in the fictional world, i.e., the strange new world. In the TTM, the time traveller, on the one hand, felt helpless to lose his time machine in that strange new world, but he was overwhelmed by its beauty and oddness on the other.

It is worth noting that "strange + n." draws our attention to the importance of considering the conceptualization of "strange white flowers" through the text-world analysis derived from cognitive poetics. For this reason, the next section will go deep into the concordance and context.

4.4 Concordance and Context: The Text World construed by strange white flowers

"Strange white flowers" only appear twice in TTM. One is in chapter 4 and the other in the epilogue; the former will be presented with its concrete context and analyzed next:

*"My general impression of the world I saw over their heads was a tangled waste of beautiful bushes and flowers, a long-neglected and yet weedless garden. I saw a number of tall spikes of **strange white flowers**, measuring a foot perhaps across the spread of the waxen petals. They grew scattered, as if wild, among the variegated shrubs, but, as I say, I did not examine them closely at this time. The Time Machine was left deserted on the turf among the rhododendrons."* (In Chapter 4 of TTM)

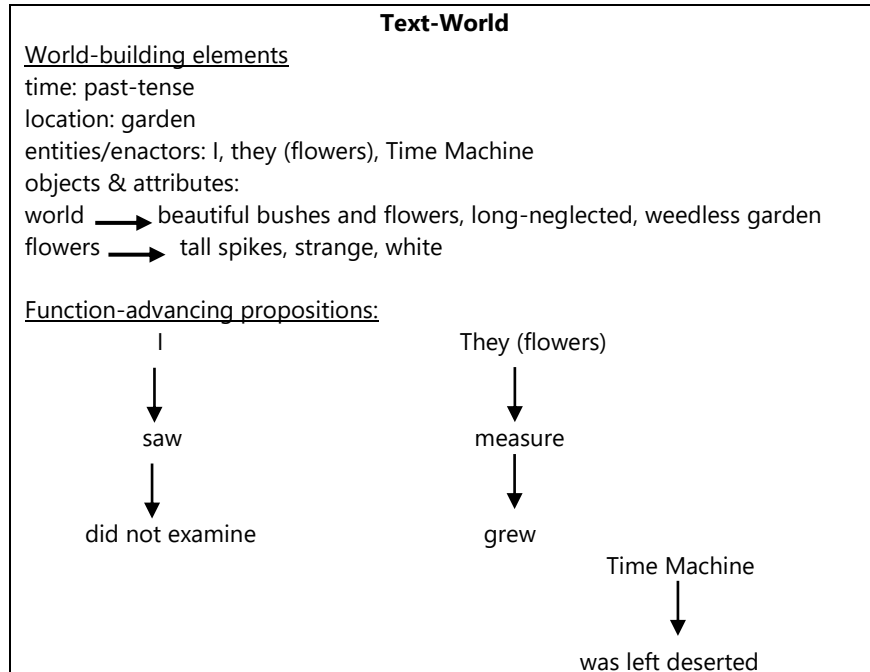


Figure 6. Text-world diagram representing the world-builders and function-advancers from a passage about “strange white flowers” in Chapter 4 of TTM.

In figure 6, horizontal arrows represent relational processes that offer description, while vertical arrows mark material action processes that present actions. This text-world analysis accounts for readers' mental representations of the fictional worlds while reading (Harrison, 2017, p.27). From the view of Stockwell (2002, p.137), this is an economical way to specify the necessary contextual information to identify the entire texts and the worlds created in readers' minds.

In the diagram, “flowers” are enactors, constructing a domain of existence from the ontological perspective (Gibbo & Whiteley, 2018, p.229), as they exist in the mind of readers. The previous section has mentioned that the journey of the Time Traveller is an epistemological one to search for knowledge as the future is full of uncertainty. Here, after depicting the contextual knowledge in a condensed way, it is about ontology, finding the existence of those enactors that build the text world.

However, “flowers” are at the same time the objects of the enactor “I”, namely the Time Traveller, so the construction of the fictional world is the interaction between enactors and objects. It deserves noting that “Time Machine” is also an enactor in this passage, but in its function-advancing proposition, it appeared in the passive form, so its underlying enactor is the Time Traveller. It concerns Bowden's (2019) claim that there is a competition for narrative attention, as reviewed before. So, this generates a unique atmospheric effect of “strange white flowers”, which is a rather compelling one. As we can see, flowers, bushes, shrubs, turf, and rhododendrons, are drawn to the core in this text world centering on those flowers, while the Time Machine of great significance is temporarily left behind.

4.5 Beyond context: Atmospheric effects of strange white flowers

The purpose of this section is to summarize the atmospheric effects previously discussed. At the micro-level, it is found from the comparison of White Sphinx and white flowers that there is a connection between uncertainty and transiency, but when “strange white flowers” are present in the epilogue, it is a relatively aspiring sign different from the main narration of class degeneration. Moreover, the strangeness or the sense of estrangement presented reflects the usage of the word strange, which builds a strange newness in an alternate reality of the elusive fictional world. At the meso-level, it revealed through the text-world analysis of the concrete passage where the “strange white flowers” appeared that flowers with other plants drew readers' attention closer to the narrative point. That is on account that flowers are competing with the Time Machine at that moment, constructing a compelling effect. At the macro-level, it is about the composited effects. Context is text-driven, and those contextual elements are “incremented into the common ground” (Stockwell, 2002, p.137). During this discourse processing, accumulated feelings, as well as emotional ambience, also spread out. Then, these combined atmospheric effects are above the text with their diffused characteristics. These effects collectively endow those strange white flowers with an aroma of diffusive effect.

5. Conclusion

The study aims to research the atmospheric effects of "strange white flowers" in *The Time Machine*. It applied Sketch Engine to generate keywords and a wordlist of adjectives and used CQPweb to discuss the collocation of "white flowers" and "White Sphinx." In addition, colligation "adj. + flowers" and "strange + n." are also included in the discussion. Moreover, this study has summarized all the atmospheric effects after the text-world presentation based on the concrete context.

Results revealed that these flowers show their aroma of transiency, strangeness, and positive attitude towards uncertainty on the one hand and compelling feeling out of competition with the main targets of the narration on the other. These findings have significant implications for making a further step towards a combined analysis of corpus and cognitive stylistics by drawing those peripheral objects closer to the literary analysis of science fiction. However, these findings are limited by a lack of quantitative analysis, which is also a recommendation for further research.

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