

H. G. Wells

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Herbert George Wells



Born: September 21, 1866
Bromley, Kent, England

Died: August 13, 1946 (age 79)
London, England

Occupation: Novelist, Teacher, Historian,
Journalist

Nationality:  English

Genres: Science Fiction

Influences: Darwinian Theory,
Mark Twain,
Mary Shelley,
Jonathan Swift

Influenced: Olaf Stapledon,
Stanley G. Weinbaum,
Edgar Rice Burroughs,
H.P. Lovecraft,
Frank R. Paul,
Robert Goddard,
Isaac Asimov,
Arthur C. Clarke,
Carl Sagan,
Jack Williamson
Stan Lee

Herbert George Wells (September 21, 1866 – August 13, 1946), better known as **H. G. Wells**, was an English writer best known for such science fiction novels as *The Time Machine*, *The War of the Worlds*, *The Invisible Man*, *The First Men in the Moon* and *The Island of Doctor Moreau*. He was a prolific writer of both fiction and non-fiction, and produced works in many different genres, including contemporary novels, history, and social commentary. He was also an outspoken socialist. His later works become increasingly

political and didactic, and only his early science fiction novels are widely read today. Both Wells and Jules Verne are sometimes referred to as "The Father of Science Fiction".^[1]

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Biography

Early life

Herbert George Wells, the fourth and last child of Joseph Wells (a former domestic gardener, and at the time shopkeeper and cricketer) and his wife Sarah Neal (a former domestic servant), was born at Atlas House, 47 High Street, Bromley, in the county of Kent.^[2] The family was of the impoverished lower-middle-class. An inheritance had allowed them to purchase a china shop, though they quickly realised it would never be a prosperous concern: the stock was old and worn out, and the location was poor. They managed to earn a meagre income, but little of it came from the shop. Joseph sold cricket bats and balls and other equipment at the matches he played at, and received an unsteady amount of money from the matches, since at that time there were no professional cricketers, and payment for skilled bowlers and batters came from voluntary donations afterwards, or from small payments from the clubs where matches were played.

A defining incident of young Wells's life is said to be an accident he had in 1874, when he was seven years old, which left him bedridden with a broken leg. To pass the time he started reading, and soon became devoted to the other worlds and lives to which books gave him access; they also stimulated

his desire to write. Later that year he entered Thomas Morley's Commercial Academy, a private school founded in 1849 following the bankruptcy of Morley's earlier school. The teaching was erratic, the curriculum mostly focused, Wells later said, on producing copperplate handwriting and doing the sort of sums useful to tradesmen. Wells continued at Morley's Academy until 1880. In 1877 another accident affected his life, when his father, Joseph Wells, fractured his thigh. The accident effectively put an end to Joseph's career as a cricketer, and his earnings as a shopkeeper were not enough to compensate for the loss.

No longer able to support themselves financially, the family instead sought to place their boys as apprentices to various professions. From 1881 to 1883 Wells had an unhappy apprenticeship as a draper at the Southsea Drapery Emporium. His experiences were later used as inspiration for his novels *The Wheels of Chance* and *Kipps*, which describe the life of a draper's apprentice as well as being a critique of the world's distribution of wealth.

Wells's mother and father had never got along with one another particularly well (she was a Protestant, he a free thinker), and when she went back to work

as a lady's maid (at Uppark, a country house in Sussex) one of the conditions of work was that she would not have space for husband or children; thereafter, she and Joseph lived separate lives, though they never divorced and neither ever developed any other liaison. Wells not only failed at being a draper, he also failed as a chemist's assistant and had bad experiences as a teaching assistant. After each failure, he would arrive at Uppark - "the bad shilling back again!" as he said - and stay there until a fresh start could be arranged for him. Fortunately for Wells, Uppark had a magnificent library in which he immersed himself.

Teacher

In 1883, Wells's employer dismissed him, claiming to be dissatisfied with him. The young man was reportedly not displeased with this ending to his apprenticeship. Later that year, he became an assistant teacher at Midhurst Grammar School, in West Sussex (teaching students such as A.A. Milne^[3]), until he won a scholarship to the Normal School of Science (later the Royal College of Science, now part of Imperial College, London) in London, studying biology

under T. H. Huxley. As an alumnus, he later helped to set up the Royal College of Science Association, of which he became the first president in 1909. Wells studied in his new school until 1887 with an allowance of twenty-one shillings a week thanks to his scholarship.



H. G. Wells in 1908 at the door of his house at Sandgate

He soon entered the Debating Society of the school. These years mark the beginning of his interest in a possible reformation of society. At first approaching the subject through studying *The Republic* by Plato, he soon turned to contemporary ideas of socialism as expressed by the recently formed Fabian Society and free lectures delivered at Kelmscott House, the home of William Morris. He was also among the founders of *The Science School Journal*, a school

magazine which allowed him to express his views on literature and society. The school year 1886-1887 was the last year of his studies. In spite of having previously successfully passed his exams in both biology and physics, his lack of interest in geology resulted in his failure to pass and the loss of his scholarship. It was not until 1890 that Wells earned a Bachelor of Science degree in Zoology from the University of London External Programme.

Upon leaving the Normal School of Science, Wells was left without a source of income. His aunt Mary, a cousin of his father, invited him to stay with her for a while, so at least he did not face the problem of housing. During his stay with his aunt, he grew interested in her daughter, Isabel.

Marriage and liaisons

In 1891 Wells married his cousin Isabel Mary Wells, but left her in 1894 for one of his students, Amy Catherine Robbins, whom he married in 1895. He had two sons by Amy: George Philip (known as 'Gip') in 1901 and Frank Richard in 1903.^[4]

During his marriage to Amy, Wells had liaisons

with a number of women, including the American birth control activist and eugenicist Margaret Sanger.^[5] In 1909 he had a daughter, Anna-Jane, with the writer Amber Reeves,^[4] whose parents William and Maud Pember Reeves he had met through the Fabian Society, and in 1914, a son, Anthony West, by the novelist and feminist Rebecca West, twenty-six years his junior.^[6] In spite of Amy Catherine's knowledge of some of these affairs, she remained married to Wells until her death in 1927.^[4] Wells also had liaisons with Odette Keun and Moura Budberg.

"I was never a great amorist," Wells wrote in *Experiment in Autobiography* (1934), "though I have loved several people very deeply."

Artist

As one method of self-expression, Wells tended to sketch. One common location for these sketches was the endpapers and title pages of his own books, and they covered a wide variety of topics, from political commentary to his feelings toward his literary contemporaries and his current romantic interests. During his marriage to Amy Catherine, whom he nicknamed Jane, he sketched

a considerable number of pictures, many of them being overt comments on their marriage. It was during this period, and this period only, that he called his sketches "picshuas." These picshuas have been the topic of study by Wells scholars for many years, and recently a book was published on the subject.^[7]

Game designer

Seeking a more structured way to play war games, Wells wrote *Floor Games* (1911) followed by *Little Wars* (1913). *Little Wars* is recognised today as the first recreational wargame and Wells is regarded by gamers and hobbyists as "the Father of Miniature War gaming." ^[8]

Writer

Wells's first bestseller was *Anticipations* (1901).^[9] When originally serialised in a magazine it was subtitled, "An Experiment in Prophecy", and is considered his most explicitly futuristic work. Anticipating what the world would be like in the year 2000, the book is interesting both for its hits (trains and cars resulting in the dispersion of population from cities to suburbs; moral

restrictions declining as men and women seek greater sexual freedom; the defeat of German militarism, and the existence of a European Union) and its misses (he did not expect successful aircraft before 1950, and averred that "my imagination refuses to see any sort of submarine doing anything but suffocate its crew and founder at sea").

His early novels, called "scientific romances", invented a number of themes now classic in science fiction in such works as *The Time Machine*, *The Invisible Man*, *The War of the Worlds* and *The First Men in the Moon* (which have all been made into films). He also wrote

other, non-fantastic novels which have received critical acclaim, including *Kipps* and the satire on Edwardian advertising, *Tono-Bungay*.

Wells also wrote several dozen short stories and novellas, the best known of which is "The Country of the Blind" (1904). Besides being an important



Statue of a *The War of the Worlds* tripod, erected as a tribute to H. G. Wells in Woking town centre, UK.

occurrence of blindness in literature, this is Wells's commentary on humanity's ability to overcome any inconvenience after a few generations and think that it is normal.

Though *Tono-Bungay* was not a science-fiction novel, radioactive decay plays a small but consequential role in it. Radioactive decay plays a much larger role in *The World Set Free* (1914). This book contains what is surely his biggest prophetic "hit." Scientists of the day were well aware that the natural decay of radium releases energy at a slow rate over thousands of years. The *rate* of release is too slow to have practical utility, but the *total amount* released is huge. Wells's novel revolves around an (unspecified) invention that accelerates the process of radioactive decay, producing bombs that explode with no more than the force of ordinary high explosive— but which "continue to explode" for days on end. "Nothing could have been more obvious to the people of the earlier twentieth century," he wrote, "than the rapidity with which war was becoming impossible... [but] they did not see it until the atomic bombs burst in their fumbling hands." Leó Szilárd acknowledged that the book inspired him to theorise the nuclear chain reaction.

Wells also wrote nonfiction. His bestselling two-volume work, *The Outline of History* (1920), began a new era of popularised world history. It received a mixed critical response from professional historians, but was praised by Arnold J. Toynbee as the best introductory history available.[1] Many other authors followed with 'Outlines' of their own in other subjects. Wells reprised his *Outline* in 1922 with a much shorter popular work, *A Short History of the World*[2], and two long efforts, *The Science of Life* (1930) and *The Work, Wealth and Happiness of Mankind* (1931). The 'Outlines' became sufficiently common for James Thurber to parody the trend in his humorous essay, "An Outline of Scientists" — indeed, Wells's *Outline of History* remains in print with a new 2005 edition, while *A Short History of the World* has been recently reedited (2006).

From quite early in his career, he sought a better way to organise society, and wrote a number of Utopian novels. Usually starting with the world rushing to catastrophe, until people realise a better way of living: whether by mysterious gases from a comet causing people to behave rationally (*In the Days of the Comet*), or a world council of scientists taking over, as in *The Shape of Things to Come*

(1933, which he later adapted for the 1936 Alexander Korda film, *Things to Come*). This depicted, all too accurately, the impending World War, with cities being destroyed by aerial bombs. He also portrayed social reconstruction through the rise of fascist dictators in *The Autocracy of Mr Parham* (1930) and *The Holy Terror* (1939).

Wells contemplates the ideas of nature vs. nurture and questions humanity in books like *The Island of Doctor Moreau*. Not all his scientific romances ended in a happy Utopia, as the dystopian *When the Sleeper Wakes* (1899, rewritten as *The Sleeper Awakes*, 1910) shows. *The Island of*

Doctor Moreau is even darker. The narrator, having been trapped on an island of animals vivisected (unsuccessfully) into human beings, eventually returns to England; like Gulliver on his return from the Houyhnhnms, he finds himself unable to shake off the perceptions of his fellow



H. G. Wells in 1943

humans as barely civilised beasts, slowly reverting back to their animal natures.

Wells also wrote the preface for the first edition of W. N. P. Barbellion's diaries, *The Journal of a Disappointed Man*, published in 1919. Since "Barbellion" was the real author's pen-name, many reviewers believed Wells to have been the true author of the *Journal*; Wells always denied this, despite being full of praise for the diaries, but the rumours persisted until Barbellion's death later that year.

In 1927, Florence Deeks sued Wells for plagiarism, claiming that he had stolen much of the content of *The Outline of History* from a work, *The Web*, she had submitted to the Canadian Macmillan Company, but who held onto the manuscript for eight months before rejecting it. Despite numerous similarities in phrasing and factual errors, the court found Wells not guilty.

In 1936, before the Royal Institution of Great Britain, Wells called for the compilation of a constantly growing and changing World Encyclopaedia, to be reviewed by outstanding authorities and made accessible to every human being. In 1938, he published a collection of essays

on the future organisation of knowledge and education, *World Brain*, including the essay, "The Idea of a Permanent World Encyclopaedia."

Near the end of the Second World War, Allied forces discovered that the SS had compiled lists of intellectuals and politicians slated for immediate liquidation upon the invasion of England in the abandoned Operation Sea Lion. The name "H. G. Wells" appeared high on the list for the "crime" of being a socialist. Wells, as president of the International PEN (Poets, Essayists, Novelists), had already angered the Nazis by overseeing the expulsion of the German PEN club from the international body in 1934 following the German PEN's refusal to admit non-Aryan writers to its membership.

Political efforts

Wells called his political views socialist, but he occasionally found himself at odds with other socialists. He was for a time a member of the Fabian Society, but broke with them as he intended them to be an organisation far more radical than they wanted. He later grew staunchly critical of them as having a poor understanding of economics

and educational reform. He also ran as a Labour Party candidate for London University in 1922 and 1923, but even at that point his faith in that party was weak or uncertain.

His most consistent political ideal was the World State. He stated in his autobiography that from 1900 onward he considered a world-state inevitable. The details of this state varied but in general it would be a planned society that would advance science, end nationalism, and allow people to advance solely by merit rather than birth. He also was consistent that it must not be a democracy. He stated that in the same period he came to realise a world-state was inevitable, he realised that parliamentary democracy as then practised was insufficient. Wells remained fairly consistent in rejection of a world-state being a parliamentary democracy and therefore during his work on the United Nations Charter he opposed any mention of democracy. He feared that the average citizen could never be educated or aware enough to decide the major issues of the world. Therefore he favoured the vote be limited to scientists, organisers, engineers, and others of merit. At the same time he strongly believed citizens should have as much freedom as they could without consequently restricting the freedom

of others. These values came under increasing criticism from the 1920s and afterwards.^[10]

That said, he remained confident of the inevitability of a planned world state well into the 1930s. Lenin's attempts at reconstructing the shattered Russian economy, as his account of a visit (*Russia in the Shadows*; 1920) shows, also related towards that. This is because at first he believed Lenin might lead to the kind of planned world he envisioned. This despite the fact that he was a strongly anti-Marxist socialist who would later state that it would've been better if Karl Marx was never born. The leadership of Joseph Stalin led to a change in his view of the Soviet Union even though his initial impression of Stalin himself was mixed. He disliked what he saw as a narrow orthodoxy and obdurance to the facts in Stalin. However he did give him some praise saying, "I have never met a man more fair, candid, and honest" and making it clear that he felt the "sinister" image of Stalin was unfair or simply false. Nevertheless he judged Stalin's rule to be far too rigid, restrictive of independent thought, and blinkered to lead toward the Cosmopolis he hoped for.^[11]

In the end his contemporary political impact was

limited. His efforts to help form the League of Nations became a disappointment as the organisation turned out to be a weak one unable to prevent World War II. The war itself increased the pessimistic side of his nature. In his last book *Mind at the End of its Tether* (1945) he considered the idea that humanity being replaced by another species might not be a bad idea. He also came to call the era "The age of frustration." He spent his final years venting this frustration at various targets which included a neighbour who erected a large sign to a servicemen's club. As he devoted his final decades toward causes which were largely rejected by contemporaries, this caused his literary reputation to decline. One critic said, "Mr. Wells is a born storyteller who has sold his birthright for a pot of message."^[12]

Wells, like many in his time, believed in the theory of eugenics. In 1904 he discussed a survey paper by Francis Galton, co-founder of eugenics, saying "I believe .. It is in the sterilisation of failure, and not in the selection of successes for breeding, that the possibility of an improvement of the human stock lies." Some contemporary supporters even suggested connections between the "degenerate" man-creatures portrayed in *The Time Machine* and Wells's eugenic beliefs. For example, this is what

Irving Fisher, the economist, said in his 1912 presidential address to the Eugenics Research Association: "The Nordic race will... vanish or lose its dominance if, in fact, the whole human race does not sink so low as to become the prey, as H. G. Wells images, of some less degenerate animal!"^[13]

Wells died on 13 August, 1946, at his home at 13 Hanover Terrace, Regent's Park, London, which now bears his commemorative blue plaque.

Legacy

In his lifetime and after his death, Wells was considered a prominent socialist thinker. In later years, however, Wells's image has shifted and he is now thought of simply as one of the pioneers of science fiction.

Appearances in other contexts

H. G. Wells has been portrayed in a number of novels and films, including:

- The novel *The Time Ships*, by British author Stephen Baxter, was designated by the Wells

estate as an authorised sequel to *The Time Machine*, marking the centenary of its publication, and features characters, situations and technobabble from several of Wells's stories, as well as a representation of Wells (unnamed, and referred to as 'my friend, the Author').

- In C. S. Lewis's novel *That Hideous Strength*, the character Jules is a caricature of Wells, and much of Lewis's science fiction was written both under the influence of Wells and as an antithesis to his work. The devoutly Christian Lewis was especially incensed at Wells's *The Shape of Things to Come* where a future world government systematically persecutes and completely obliterates Christianity (and all other religions), which the book presents as a positive and vitally necessary act.
- Wells's photo appears on a stairway wall of time traveller Alex Hartdegen's New York brownstone, in a 2002 version of *The Time Machine*, directed by Wells's great-grandson Simon Wells. The 1960 movie version has a plate on the Time Machine telling that it had been manufactured by "H. George Wells"
- Arthur Sammler, the main character of Saul Bellow's *Mr. Sammler's Planet*, knew Wells, and is urged by other characters to use that

fact as the basis for writing a biography of Wells, a project about which Holocaust survivor and self-made philosopher Sammler has decidedly mixed feelings.

- Wells appears as the protagonist in the 1979 film *Time After Time*, and in the novel *The Martian War* by Kevin J. Anderson (as "Gabriel Mesta"). Both works use the conceit that Wells's works were based upon actual adventures he had.
- In an episode of *Lois & Clark: The New Adventures of Superman*, entitled *Tempus Fugitive*, a time-travelling H. G. Wells (Terry Kiser) seeks out Superman's help to stop a criminal from the future whom Wells had accidentally unleashed on the present. The concept of Wells's time machine being stolen and used for evil closely resembles the plot of *Time After Time*. Both H. G. Wells and the criminal Tempus returned for three later episodes.
- In an adventure in the BBC's *Doctor Who*, the two-part, 90-minute *Timelash*, the time-travelling Doctor encounters an excitable young man, Herbert, in the Scottish Highlands, taking him on an adventure that is revealed to have been inspirational when it is finally realised this is the pre-published Wells.

- In the Disney Channel series *Phil of the Future*, the title character attends a fictional school named H. G. Wells Junior High, the name of the school possibly drawn from the show's science fiction manner.
- In Ben Bova's short story "Inspiration", the narrator gets Wells to meet a young Albert Einstein and Lord Kelvin. In the end of the story he (Wells) gave a tip to a 6 year old Adolf Hitler.
- The movie *Librarian: Quest for The Spear*, ends with the main character, Flynn Carsen, getting a mission to retrieve H. G. Wells's Time Machine.
- Newt Gingrich, former Speaker of the United States House of Representatives and staunch Republican, praised Wells in his book *To Renew America*, writing "Our generation is still seeking its Jules Verne or H. G. Wells to dazzle our imaginations with hope and optimism".^[14] It should be noted, however, that even though Mr. Gingrich has written science fiction himself, he was speaking as a politician, not as a literary critic.
- In the movie *The Maltese Falcon* Kasper Gutman recounts the history of the bird emphasizing that "Those are facts, historical facts, not school book history, not Mr. Wells'

history, but facts nevertheless."

- In the science/historical fiction novel *And Having Writ...*, Wells is a major character.

Works

Honours

- H. G. Wells crater on the far side of the Moon is named for him.
- H. G. Wells was a honorary fellow of the Imperial College of Science and Technology



H. G. Wells

Books

The Country of the Blind and Other Stories
Floor Games · Little Wars · A Modern Utopia
The New World Order · The Open Conspiracy
The Outline of History · Russia in the Shadow
Tales of Space and Time · The Science of Life
The Shape of Things to Come ·
The Stolen Bacillus and Other Incidents ·
Travels of a Republican Radical in Search of Hot

· *World Brain*

	<i>Ann Veronica · The First Men in the Moon The Food of the Gods and How It Came to Eat The History of Mr Polly · The Invisible Man The Island of Dr Moreau · Kipps · Love and Mr Lewisham · Men Like Gods · The Sleeper Awakes · Star-Begotten · The Time Machine · Tono-Bungay · The War in the Air · The War of the Worlds · The Wheels of Chance The World Set Free</i>
Novels	
	"The Chronic Argonauts" · "The Country of the Eo "The Crystal Egg" · "Empire of the Ants" · "The Land Ironclads" · "The Man Who Could Work Miracles" · "The Red Room" · "The Stolen Body" · "A Story of the Days To Come" · "A Story of the Stone Age" · "A Vision of Judgment"
Short Stories	
Works	<i>The Man Who Could Work Miracles · Things to Come</i>

Footnotes

1. ^ Adam Charles Roberts(2000), "The History of Science Fiction": Page 48 in *Science Fiction*, Routledge, ISBN 0-415-19204-8. Others who are popularly called the "Father of non Fiction" include Hugo Gernsback and Jules Verne.
2. ^ Parrinder, Patrick (2004). *Oxford Dictionary of*

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3. ^ A(lan) A(lexander) Milne (1882-1956). *Authors' Calendar*. Retrieved on 2007-04-13.
4. ^ **a b c** ThinkQuest Library. *H. G. Wells Biography*.
5. ^ University of Illinois News Bureau, December 2001. *New biography on H. G. Wells focuses on late-life loves*.
6. ^ Pegasos - A Literature Related Resource Site. *Herbert George Wells (1866-1946)*.
7. ^ Rinkel, Gene and Margaret. *The Picshuas of H. G. Wells : A burlesque diary*. Urbana : University of Illinois Press, 2006. ISBN 0-252-03045-1 (cloth : acid-free paper).
8. ^ The Miniatures Page. *The World of Miniatures - An Overview*.
9. ^ World Transhumanist Association. *Herbert George Wells*.
10. ^ *An Experiment in Autobiography* 556. Also chapter four of *Future as Nightmare: H. G. Wells and the Anti-Utopians* by Mark Robert Hillegas.
11. ^ *An Experiment in Autobiography* p. 215, 687-689
12. ^ Encyclopedia Americana vol. 28 p. 616 and *The Scientific Romance in Britain: 1890-1950* by Brian Stableford. Also The "pot of message" remark comes from a 1948 Theodore Sturgeon short story entitled *Unite and Conquer*, a character in the story was quoting a "Dr. Pierce".
13. ^ David M. Levy and Sandra J. Peart. "Eugenics Rides a Time Machine: H. G. Wells's outline of genocide". *Reason Magazine*. March 26, 2002
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Further reading

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See also

- H. G. Wells Society
- Science Fiction
- Invasion literature
- Fabian Society
- List of Socialists
- Cosmotheism
- Noosphere
- Omega Point
- Bolesław Prus, regarding Prus' review of Wells's *Anticipations*.

External links

Sources - collections

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- Works by H. G. Wells at Project Gutenberg Australia, post-1923.
- H. G. Wells at the Internet Speculative Fiction Database
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Sources - letters, essays and interviews

- "Stephen Crane. From an English Standpoint", by Wells, 1900.
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- "Wells's Autobiography", by John Hart, from *New International*, Vol.2 No.2, March 1935, pp.75-76
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- "The Beginning of Wisdom: On Reading H.

G. Wells", by Vivian Gornick, "Boston Review", 31.1 (2007).

Other

- 1984 audio interview of Anthony West, son of H. G. Wells, by Don Swaim of CBS Radio- RealAudio.
- John Hammond, The Complete List of Short Stories of H. G. Wells
- Website examining the legacy of The War Of The Worlds

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"http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/H._G._Wells"

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