

H. G. WELLS'S SCIENCE-FICTION NOVELS

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Science-fiction is a modern genre of literature. It can be either fictitious or imaginative, but it should be based on the existing science and technology.

M.H. Abrams thinks,

The term science-fiction is applied to those narratives in which unlike in pure fantasy an explicit attempt is made to render plausible the fictional world by reference to the known or imagined scientific principles, or to a projected advance in technology, or to a drastic change in the organization of society. (Abrams 355)

Wells was born in London in 1866. His father Sr Wells and mother were just working-class people. The family had five children. Wells studied in government school and graduated from London University; and one of his teachers was T.H. Huxley. Wells became a socialist. He started journalism and creative writing.

Wells's literary output was vast and extremely varied. His scientific romances were among the earliest products of the new genre of science fiction. The first, *The Time Machine* (1893), is a social allegory set in the year 802701, describing a society divided into two classes, little subterranean workers, called Morlocks, and the decadent Eloi. This was followed by *The Wonderful Visit* (1895), *The Island of Doctor Moreau* (1896), *The Invisible Man* (1897), *The War of the Worlds* (1898), *When the Sleeper Wakes* (1899), *The First Men on the Moon* (1901), *Men Like Gods* (1923), and others. Wells's preoccupation with social as well as scientific progress distinguishes them from the fantasies of Jules Verne.

Another group of comic novels evokes the lower-middle-class world of Wells's youth. *Love and Mr Lewisham* (1900) tells the story of a struggling teacher. *Kipps* (1905) depicts an aspiring draper's assistant. *The History of Mr Polly* (1910) recounts the adventures of Alfred Polly, an inefficient shopkeeper who liberates himself by burning down his own shop and bolting for freedom, which he discovers as man-of-all-work at the Potwell Inn.

Ann Veronica (1909) is a feminist tract about a girl who, fortified by the concept of the New Woman, defies her father and conventional morality. *Tono-Bungay* (1909) is a picture of English society in dissolution, and of the advent of a new class of rich entrepreneurs. *The Country of the Blind, and Other Stories* (1911), his fifth collection of short stories contains the memorable 'The Door in the Wall'. He continued to reach a huge audience with *A Short History of the World* (1922), and with many works of scientific and political speculation which confirmed his position as one of the great popularizers and one of the most influential voices of his age. However, his last prediction, *Mind at the End of its Tether* (1945), is darkly pessimistic.

Wells's *Experiment in Autobiography* (1934) is a striking- portrait of himself, his contemporaries including Arnold Bennett, George Gissing, and the Fabians and their times. *Aspects of a Life* (1984) is a memoir by Anthony West (1914-87), Wells's son by Rebecca West.

The present article focuses on H.G. Wells' science-fiction writings mainly his two futuristic novels *The Time Machine*, *The First Men on the Moon*, *The Invisible Man*, *The Island of Dr Moreau*, and the two war novels *The War in the Air* and *The War of the Worlds*.

The major themes in Wells's novels are as follows:

1. The advent of aircraft, tanks
2. Space travel, alien invasion, nuclear weapons, satellite TV and www.
3. Invisibility, and biological engineering.

1. The Time Machine (1895)

The Time Machine speaks of two kinds of people Eloi and Morlocks. Eloi (aristocrats) are gentle, fairy-like, children creatures. Their life is free from struggle and they live above grounds. The other category people called Morlocks (working-class) live underground, and they live upon Eloi. The story takes place a million years hence. Wells tries to drive home the point that the Darwinian model of evolution fast-forwards the physical world and the solar system. *The Time Machine* is a class fable, a scientific parable. The Victorian people were divided into the upper class and lower class, both having degenerated as Matthew Arnold spoke of them. The novel is a dystopia as opposed to Sir Thomas More's *Utopia* or more particularly opposed to William Morris' *News from Nowhere*.

The novel is in two parts. The structure is a dream within reality. The narrator and Time Traveler tell the story to their guests. Wells's novel reflects his society and its class warfare. It speaks of socialist political views of his age. Then the society was divided as the aristocrats and working class. Wells was a working-class man. The workers lived in basements (as Morlocks).

2. The First Men on the Moon (1901):

This is a scientific romance. It is a fantasy. *The First Men on the Moon* tells the story of two characters' travel to the moon. They are Mr Bedford, a businessman narrator and Mr Cavor, an eccentric scientist. The two discover that the moon is inhabited by insect-like people called 'Selenites'. The selenites do not allow these two people to know their knowledge.

Wells's The First Men in the Moon is viewed as a dystopia. It speaks about creatures that travel in space. Such things we see in Frank Herbert's *Hellstrom's Hive*. Nigel Kneale adapted Wells's novel for a film in 1964. The 1925 novel *Menace from the Moon* (by Bohun Lynch), and the 1999 novel *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen* (by Black Dossier) feature Selenites. Cavorite (anti-gravity material) is used in *Warehouse 13*, *Scarlet Traces*, *Voyage*, *The Martian War*, *A Deepness in the Sky*, *Space 1889 and Beyond*, *Jeff Wayne's War of the Worlds*, *Jasan's Wanderel Orphen's Legacy* and others.

3. The Invisible Man (1897):

The Invisible Man is about Dr Griffin, a chemist-scientist. He works on optics. He creates the characteristic of invisibility and applies it to a cat and finally to himself. But he does not know how to revert it. So he is killed. His two collaborators Marvel and Kemp are well-projected. Dr Griffin is a brilliant scientist who discovers a method of invisibility but finds himself unable to reverse the process.

4. The Island of Dr Moreau:

The Island of Dr Moreau is a scientific romance. Wells published it 1896. It is an evolutionary fantasy about a shipwrecked naturalist who becomes involved in an experiment to 'humanize' animals by surgery. The theme was developed by Brian Aldiss.

Dr Moreau is almost a mad servant, creating human-like hybrid beings from animals via vivisection. The novel delves on pain, cruelty, moral responsibility, human identity and man's interference with Nature.

5. The War in the Air (1908):

This is a war novel. It anticipated World War I in 1914. It speaks of the use of aircraft. The hero Bert Smallways is an engineer and a forward-looking man. He invents airplane. The novel recounts the events of German attack, battle in North America, attack on New York City, the world war involving the Japanese and Chinese, camp at Niagara, and finally Britain winning the war against Germany.

6. The war of the Worlds (1898):

The theme is the invasion subgenre of the time. The novel also speaks on colonialism, superstitions, evolution, and the common man's fears and prejudices. Wells's brother Frank Wells and he discussed the bad impact of European colonialism on Tasmanians (Australia). Wells wondered what will happen if Martians invade England in like manner.

The War of the Worlds is a classic. It is popular still. It was adapted to films/ tv shows/ comics a dozen times. Its radio programme caused panic in New York. The novel influenced scientists like Robert Goddard who invented liquid fueled rocket and multistage rocket which enabled Apollo 11's moon-landing 71 years later in the 1970s.

The Martians establish a reign of terror on large scale. The poor Working people as much as the author cannot stop them. They sound like al-Qaeda terrorists, destroying people in Srinagar and Mumbai in India. Wells had already described the acts of mutilation and violence, even death in *The Time Machine*, *The Islands of Dr Moreau* and *The Wheels of Chance*.

In brief, Wells thinks that man's belief in theological salvation is ill-founded. So man must apply science and achieve the much needed progress in both culture and civilization.

References:

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2. Parrinder, Patrick. *H.G. Wells*. Edinburgh: Oliver, 1970.