

H.G.Wells

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This is a little thin book I discovered in my library. Having in recent years read a few of Wells books I was a bit intrigued. As I found out later, its author is still alive, only a few years older than me, and wrote the book in 1970 (I picked up a 1977 edition) when quite a young man. It entails a systematic critical assessment of most of Wells writing which to me comes across as a tedious cataloging of books which I do not want to read. Wells has nowadays a somewhat diminished reputation as a mere science-fiction writer, although his extended love-life has recently come to attention, as done by David Lodge¹ who incidentally is mentioned several times in the book. Science-fiction has a bad reputation, possibly because so much of it has been of the pulp quality only marginally rising from the level of 'pornography' presenting sensational but lazy day-dreams for idle minds. By the end of the 19th century technology had reached such a level as to seriously change the lives of individuals as well as societies presenting existential problems as to the future of mankind and its diminished place in the universe, themes which Wells chose to address in fictional form. Nothing wrong with that, adding new premises stimulates the imagination of readers and author alike, and Wells did indeed, as every writer dreams of doing, profoundly influence his age, as noted by Orwell. Wells rose from humble lower middle class circumstances and was for a relatively brief period apprenticed as a draper, a most traumatic experience he likened to Dickens humiliation at a blackening factory, before he managed to get himself an education. He got a solid scientific training in London, partly under the tutelage of Thomas Huxley, and the themes of his books invariably consists in the exploration of the conflict between emotions and reasons, where he stood for rationality yet aware of its limitations. Wells may mostly be remembered for his short works, his science-fiction romances which are often brilliant, while his longer, more ambitious novels, tend to be a bit wooden and tedious, and even contemporary critics, such as Virginia Woolf, remarked that they may not be remembered by posterity. Whatever you think of him, you must admire his energy and stamina as a writer, but at least from this book you get the impression that he was finished as a writer by the 1920's i.e. in his mid-fifties and that the bulk of his production stems from his thirties and forties.

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¹ 'A Man of Parts' Reviewed in those volumes in Book Reviews XI b p 67