

A Very Political Philosophy of Education:
Science Fiction, Schooling and Social Engineering in the Life and Work of H.G. Wells
Literary Lives, Political Philosophies, Public Education
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Abstract

Renowned still for his late nineteenth century science fiction, Herbert George (H.G.) Wells' (1861-1946) was a one-time teacher of science before fame from with the dystopian 'scientific romances', notably *The Time Machine* and *War of the Worlds*. While neither a systematic educational or political thinker in his time Wells' educational and political writings exerted influence. His works on educational theory were well-read if at odds, even in opposition to contemporary progressive educational practice, his educational textbooks such as his history of the world were bestsellers. In post-Revolutionary Russia he met with Lenin and other leaders of the Revolution, and documented a unique access in a neglected piece of political journalism, *Russia in the Shadows* (Wells 1920). In 1934 Wells meets Josef Stalin for a three hour interview in which author and autocrat argue pedagogical and political theory (Wells, 1934). Outlining a political agenda as part of a lifelong programme of public education, Wells' (1943) *Rights of Man* was read by Churchill and Roosevelt and impacted formation of the United Nations' (1948) Universal Declaration of the Human Rights.

This article argues that Wells' science fiction and subsequent political engagements are a continuum expressed by an imperative: that human history is held 'between education and catastrophe' (Wells 1938). The life and work of a politically unfashionable but still popular writer of science fiction are also a masterclass in establishing the critical importance of the interface of literature and political philosophy in education. Drawing from archival work on the International PEN papers at the University of Texas at Austin, by way of specific application to one area of the curriculum, the article makes too a tentative methodological case for a life trajectory approach to citizenship education research through the exploration of literary archives, political lives and political philosophies.

Introduction

Renowned still for his late nineteenth century science fiction, Herbert George (H.G.) Wells (1861-1946) was a one-time teacher of science before fame from with the dystopian 'scientific romances', notably *The Time Machine* and *War of the Worlds*. While neither a systematic educational or political thinker in his time Wells' educational and political writings exerted influence. His works on educational theory were well-read if at odds, even in opposition to contemporary progressive educational practice; his educational textbooks such as his history of the world were bestsellers. In post-Revolutionary Russia he met with Lenin and other leaders of the Revolution, and documented the early years of the Soviet experiment in *Russia in the Shadows* (Wells 1920). With casual familiarity Wells will reminisce on his meetings with cultural and literary as well as political figures, as here in one of the many

references to his old friend literary friend: ‘...while I was with Gorky I found him in constant bitter disputes with extremist officials who would see no good in any literature of the past except the literature of revolt’ (Wells 1922, np). Or, reflecting on the new Bolshevik Government, he will, with the tone of a man at ease with the powerful, mention the names of Lenin and others:

This Bolshevik Government is at once the most temerarious and the least experienced governing body in the world. In some directions its incompetence is amazing. In most its ignorance is profound. Of the diabolical cunning of "capitalism" and of the subtleties of reaction it is ridiculously suspicious, and sometimes it takes fright and is cruel. But essentially it is honest. It is the most simple-minded Government that exists in the world to-day.

Its simple-mindedness is shown by one question that I was asked again and again during this Russian visit. "When is the social revolution going to happen in England?" Lenin asked me that, Zenovieff, who is the head of the Commune of the North, Zorin, and many others (Wells 1922 np).

In 1934 Wells meets Josef Stalin for a three hour interview in which author and autocrat argue pedagogical and political theory (Wells, 1934). Outlining a political agenda as part of a lifelong programme of public education, Wells’ (1943) *Rights of Man* was read by Churchill and Roosevelt and impacted formation of the United Nations’ (1948) Universal Declaration of the Human Rights.

This article argues that Wells’ science fiction and subsequent political engagements are a continuum expressed by an imperative: that human history is held ‘between education and catastrophe’ (Wells 1938). The life and work of a politically unfashionable but still popular writer of science fiction are also a masterclass in establishing the critical importance of the interface of literature and political philosophy in education. Yet there are strongly reactionary strains across all of Wells’ work. There is his apparent anti-Semitism in *Russia in the Shadows* – ‘Lenin, the beloved leader of all that is energetic in Russia to-day, has a Tartar type of face and is certainly no Jew’ (Wells 1922, np). As we shall see too, Wells’ apparent political liberalism, his love of academic and literary freedoms, his advocacy of human rights blends with some frightening justification of eugenics, an almost autocratic, even

paradoxically dictatorial voice. These contradictions and paradoxes in the life and work of a prolific science fiction visionary make Wells all the more fascinating. Such tensions of tone and theme seem all the more to illustrate the fascinating interface of literature and politics in Wells, and all the more so because the bridge between these two spheres of his entire adult life is a genuine commitment to educate. A one-time school science teacher, it is arguable that it is a distinctively political philosophy of education that unites Wells' literary and political endeavours through a long and we cannot say less than interesting life.

Drawing from archival work on the International PEN papers at the University of Texas at Austin, by way of specific application to political education today, the article makes too a tentative methodological case for philosophy of education research through the exploration of literary archives, political lives and political philosophies.

H.G. Wells: From Science Teacher to Science Fiction

H.G. Wells (1861-1946) was one of the most prolific and influential writers in late nineteenth and early twentieth century English literature. Wells is most famous today for his pioneering science fiction. With Jules Verne, Wells helped to create the genre. In the last decade of the nineteenth century, Wells' transition from teacher to the inventor of dystopian fiction was marked by a prolific output. Yet in his lifetime Wells was far more than a science fiction writer, making some significant contributions to political and educational thought, especially in conceptualising and influencing the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This neglect is ever the more surprising, then, in that Wells was an English writer who can claim major credit for helping to shape wider international developments in human rights. The case should not be overstated however since Wells' thinking it could be argued is derivative, and there a number of counter-arguments, in that Wells can also be portrayed as a deeply and repressively authoritarian thinker. Wells' *Rights of Man* – directly borrowing

from and establishing a conscious lineage to – Thomas Paine’s (1791) tract, and deeper historical currents of wide democratic and right-oriented political philosophy emergent in the seventeenth century and flowering in the Enlightenment and the revolutions which followed in its wake. Nevertheless, Wells’ contribution to contemporary political and educational thinking was significant, and this article brings something of Wells’ contribution to light. In this regard the article is a contribution to our knowledge and understanding of the history of citizenship education, highlighting a paucity of historical perspective in the subject. Wells had with Lenin (1920) and Stalin (1934), meetings which provide insights into a political and the educational world almost as dystopian as Wells’ science fiction, an important insight into post-Revolutionary Russia and the Soviet experiment in totalitarianism.

Born in 1866, in Bromley, Kent, to Sarah Neal (a maid ‘in service’) and Joseph Wells (a shopkeeper and county cricketer), Herbert George Wells was of schooling age in the year in which the 1870 Education Act made elementary education compulsory in England. Born too in a time when lending libraries had become a popular pastime, H.G. Wells was an avaricious reader throughout childhood. For reasons of family poverty, Wells was compelled to leave school at fourteen, and apprentice to a draper. Perennial issues of poverty and access to education resound still today as they had in Wells’ day. At a critical period in state involvement in English education, the chapter contextualised Wells’ experiences in the portrayals of nineteenth century education in English literature, showing how Wells himself used such experiences in later novels, particularly *Kipps* (1905).

Wells’ experience as a teacher of science helped shape much of his later work, fiction and non-fiction, political and educational. H.G. Wells was taught at what was later to become Imperial College London by T.H. Huxley, a noted scientific humanist and proponent of Darwin’s theory of evolution, ‘Darwin’s Bulldog’. (Huxley’s grandson was destined to become a writer of note in the field of science fiction, penning one of the seminal novels of

future dystopia, *Brave New World*.) It is in this period that Wells writes his first published volume, a textbook in biology, and Wells becomes a teacher.

Wells' experience as a teacher and educator, especially in science education was a critical, formative period in shaping the scientific themes of his science fiction. Wells' early science fiction was – with its social and political commentary – invariably related to the future of the planet and humanity. With a characteristically pessimistic view he shared with many of his nineteenth century peers, Wells' vision has arguably even more resonance with environmental and related concerns today. His most famous works at the time were *The Time Machine* (1895) and *War of the Worlds* (1898); but, amongst a prodigious output, also *The Stolen Bacillus* (1895), *The Invisible Man* (1897), *The Island Of Dr. Moreau*, (1896), *When the Sleeper Awakes* (1899) and *The First Men in the Moon* (1901). Wells' science fiction is shown to hold many of the apocalyptic themes that would surface in his scientific, prophetic, political, historical and educational works.

Political Engagement and Public Education

Wells' first significant political engagement was with the socialist-oriented Fabian Society, which, at the invitation of George Bernard Shaw, Wells joined in 1904. A lifelong advocate of socialism, Wells was not a natural committee man. Two years into his membership the delivery of his *Faults of the Fabian* was not well-received: 'So far from our being a little band of true believers in an individualistic or quite unenlightened and hostile world, we are, I hold, an extraordinarily inadequate and feeble organization in the midst of a world that teems with undeveloped possibilities of support and help for the cause we profess to further' (Wells, 1906, np). After acknowledging the work done by working-class socialist groups such as the SDF and the Independent Labour Party (ILP) in the industrial towns of northern England, Scotland, and Wales, Wells pointed out that 'there remains for us an enormous field still untouched in which we not only may work, but in which I hold we ought to be working most

strenuously now, and that is in the field of socialistic propaganda among the educated classes and the middle classes' It is the work of education which Wells sees as politically essential: '... this great mass needs educating for socialism, and then organizing for socialism, and we are doing scarcely anything, and except for isolated individual efforts, a book here, a word in season there, nobody seems to be doing anything in that direction'. Finally, Wells calls on the Fabian Society to end its exclusivity and become something of a mass movement.

But Wells favoured a gradual rather revolutionary approach to political change. In *New Worlds for Old* (1908) he states: 'Expropriation must be a gradual process, a process of economic and political readjustment, accompanied at every step by an explanatory educational advance' (New Worlds [1908] 163). And since in a context in which '[w]e need free speech, free discussion, free publication, as essentials for a wholesome Socialist State ...' it is 'Education must precede the Socialist State' (New Worlds [1908] 208, 116). As Partington comments, the 'centrality of education to Wells' political commitment would increase considerably as his worldview matured during the interwar period', part of what Partington also describes as Wells' internationalist vision in 'building cosmopolis' (Partington 2003; 2008; also Sherborne 2010).

A Short History of the World (1922), Wells abridged version of his *History of the World* (1920) was an unexpected best-seller. It is from the closing chapter of the abridged second volume that Wells famously coins the phrase that history is 'a race between education and catastrophe'. From this we see the increasing uses of Wells as a prophetic voice in political education, particularly the future uses and abuses of technology, and the rise of environmental education and activism.

And H.G. Wells was certainly an author who favoured direct political engagement, often and it is no exaggeration to say at the highest level of world politics. Thus *Russia in the Shadows* (1920) describes Wells' visit to post-revolutionary St Petersburg. Here, he provides

a vivid account of a city in ruins: 'Nowhere in all Russia is the fact of that crash so completely evident as it is in Petersburg.' Wells literary ? provides vivid detail. Where the palaces 'are still and empty' they are 'strangely refurnished with the typewriters'. It is a city which is 'engaged chiefly in a strenuous struggle against famine and the foreign invader': 'It is a wonderful fact, I think, that in this city, in which most of the shrinking population is already nearly starving, and hardly any one possesses a second suit of clothes or more than a single change of worn and patched linen, flowers can be and are still bought and sold. For five thousand roubles, which is about six and eight pence at the current rate of exchange, one can get a very pleasing bunch of big chrysanthemums.'

He stays with Maxim Gorky while in Russia and gets a sense of decay in Russia's cultural and scientific life, not only the physical impoverishment of the members of the educated and university elite ('Gorky possesses only the one suit of clothes he wears') but [u]pon many of them there had settled a kind of despair of ever seeing or hearing anything of the outer world again' (Wells 1920).

Wells had privileged access to Lenin. His records of simple asides show unique insight into the social and political conditions of the time:

This Bolshevik Government is at once the most temerarious and the least experienced governing body in the world. In some directions its incompetence is amazing. In most its ignorance is profound. Of the diabolical cunning of "capitalism" and of the subtleties of reaction it is ridiculously suspicious, and sometimes it takes fright and is cruel. But essentially it is honest. It is the most simple-minded Government that exists in the world to-day.

Its simple-mindedness is shown by one question that I was asked again and again during this Russian visit. 'When is the social revolution going to happen in England?' Lenin asked me (Wells 1920).

But it is Lunacharsky, the Minister for Education, Wells dearly wishes to see, and does not manage, due to the 'general inefficiency in Russia':

About eighty hours of my life were consumed in travelling, telephoning, and waiting about in order to talk for about an hour and a half with Lenin and for the same time with Tchitcherin. At that rate, and in view of the intermittent boat service from Reval

to Stockholm, to see Lunacharsky would have meant at least a week more in Russia (Wells 1920).

Yet if he saw ‘nothing of Lunacharsky personally’, Wells did see something of the work, as education minister, he had organised:

The primary material of the educationist is human beings, and of these at least there is still no shortage in Russia, so that in that respect Lunacharsky is better off than most of his colleagues. And beginning with an initial prejudice and much distrust, I am bound to confess that, in view of their enormous difficulties, the educational work of the Bolsheviks impresses me as being astonishingly good (Wells 1920).

Wells makes visits to two schools which provide contrasting but invaluable insights into his assessment of education in Russia in the early years of the Revolution. Of the first school visit he writes:

It was extremely well equipped, much better than an ordinary English grammar school, and the children were bright and intelligent; but our visit fell in the recess. I could witness no teaching, and the behaviour of the youngsters I saw indicated a low standard of discipline. I formed an opinion that I was probably being shown a picked school specially prepared for me, and that this was all that Petersburg had to offer (Wells 1920).

Wells’ wit and self-deprecation permeates both accounts, despite the dire circumstances.

The special guide who was with us then began to question these children upon the subject of English literature and the writers they liked most. One name dominated all others. My own. Such comparatively trivial figures as Milton, Dickens, Shakespeare ran about intermittently between the feet of that literary colossus (Wells 1920).

Being he says, questioned further, ‘these children produced the titles of perhaps a dozen of my books. I said I was completely satisfied by what I had seen and heard, that I wanted to see nothing more — for indeed what more could I possibly require?— and I left that school smiling with difficulty and thoroughly cross with my guides.’

Of the second school visit he is more approving:

I was convinced that I had been deceived about the former school, and that now I should see a very bad school indeed. Instead I saw a much better one than the first I had seen. The equipment and building were better, the discipline of the children was better, and I saw some excellent teaching in progress (Wells 1920).

Most of the teachers were women, he notes. Wells 'chose elementary geometrical teaching to observe' as 'the blackboard is in the universal language of the diagram'. He saw also 'a heap of drawings and various models the pupils had done', deeming them 'very good'. Wells noted particularly 'a well-chosen series of landscapes to assist the geographical teaching', that there were 'plenty of chemical and physical apparatus', which 'was evidently put to a proper use': 'All this was much more satisfactory.' He tests the class on 'the extraordinary vogue of H. G. Wells among the young people of Russia' and notes, this time well-pleased that, 'None of these children had ever heard of him. The school library contained none of his books. This did much to convince me that I was seeing a quite normal school.' Written at the beginning of a Soviet experiment which would last for another seven decades, the book provides a unique insight into the origins of twentieth century totalitarianism, and the subsequent century of Cold and post-Cold War politics, and the education this would shape.

In 1933 Wells became President of International PEN, the worldwide association of writers, blending literary, political as well as global educational ambition. As for PEN, it, 'has been the profession of the PEN Club to keep out of politics, but can it keep out of politics when things are in this state? *It is impossible to separate scientific and creative work from the education of the world community as a whole.* The two things are continuous and inseparable' (emphasis added). In 1933, then, PEN is confronted with now unavoidable political realities, and though it will not be realised until after the Second World War, the conflation of political ideals with educational engagement we see emergent at the 1933 Congress.

The archives of the Ransom Center at the University of Texas at Austin in the Special Collections on the worldwide writers' association International PEN contains currently un-indexed primary source material accounts of Wells' time at President, including the internal communications Newsletter of the organisation.

The April 1934 Issue, Number 63 details PEN's response to the 1933 book burnings in now Nazi-dominated Germany through the establishment of the Provisional Committee for the Foundation of the 'German Library of the Burned Books'. Nazi book burning in 1933 has come to be seen as one of the opening chapters of or at least a preface to the Holocaust:

On May 10, 1933 student groups at universities across Germany carried out a series of book burnings of works that the students and leading Nazi party members associated with an 'un-German spirit'. Enthusiastic crowds witnessed the burning of books by Brecht, Einstein, Freud, Mann and Remarque, among many other well-known intellectuals, scientists and cultural figures, many of whom were Jewish. The largest of these book bonfires occurred in Berlin, where an estimated 40,000 people gathered to hear a speech by the propaganda minister, Joseph Goebbels, in which he pronounced that 'Jewish intellectualism is dead' and endorsed the students' 'right to clean up the debris of the past' (USHMM, 2017)

The lines from Heinrich Heine's 1821 play *Almansor* would ring prophetically: 'Where they have burned *books*, they will end in burning human beings.' Committee contains distinguished names of world literature, in addition to Wells, Andre Gide, Lévy-Bruhl and Romain Rolland; 'a number of well-known scientists, authors, artists and intellectuals in many countries at once agreed in response to our appeal to associate themselves in the work of forming the German Library of the Burned Books. Prominent public support came from Vera Britain, Lady Asquith, Bertrand Russell, and John Strachey. A memo declares:

The library will contain:

1. All those works which in the Third Reich' have been burned, censored and suppressed, from Gotthold Ephraim Lessing to Heinrich Mann, from Heinrich Heine to Jacob Wassermann, from Marx to Stalin, from Einstein to Freud, from Voltaire to Andre Gide.
2. The libraries of the many German refugees who have placed their books at the disposal of the library (there are so far about 20,000 volumes)
3. All those works which are indispensable for the study and analysis of Hitlerism, from H. St Chamberlain to Rosenberg, from Wilhelm II to Hitler.
4. All the valuable material already collected in the international Archives.

The official inauguration of the library took place on the 10th May 1934, in Paris – itself to be occupied within six years – marking 'the anniversary of the auto-da-fés in Hitler Germany, when the outstanding cultural and scientific works of Germany and other countries,

embracing many centuries of thought and research, were burned in the presence of the leaders of National socialisms and many thousands of its supporters’:

It was a symbolic act. It signified that for these works of advancement there is no longer a place officially under the rule of National Socialism in Germany, It is also significant that the Provisional committee has chosen this very day for the inauguration of the library in order to demonstrate that these documents of historical value to humanity shall not be lost: that the very fact of their outward destruction and suppression has made them all the more precious to all who are striving for liberty, Progress and a new, better world order (PEN 1934: np).

The British Committee to support the Library was presided over by H.G. Wells. At PEN’s Scottish Congress Wells declares, ‘the disturbed state of the world is reflected in the present state of PEN’:

The world is a state of unexampled crisis. Wars and revolutions, violent external and internal struggles threaten mankind almost everywhere: You do not want me to talk politics. I am very much of opinion that Literature, Science, the Arts of Expression and Statement are something more important than politics and something above politics... (PEN 1934: np).

Yet if the apolitical distancing of literature from politics is maintained as an ideal the realpolitik of the need now, in this time, becomes acute and pressing, and the voice here is distinctive of a particular Wellsian view of a larger scale duty of literature in terms of political engagement as an active promoter of societal harmony between nations through the enhancing knowledge of and engagement with the arts but also defender of inherited and living cultural treasures when these are openly attacked and threatened by violence and destruction:

... what if Politics and Politicians and Police and Soldiers and so forth lift themselves up and presume to lay hands on literature and science? What if they attack *books*? What if they attack that free movement of the humankind which we call Science? What then? Can the PEN Club still remain serene and say it has nothing to do with politics? Let me remind you of the original objective of the PEN Club ... an idea that was from the first, we must admit, at least faintly political. It aims to express the intellectual brotherhood of mankind, the cosmopolis of human expression, and it is hard to say where the boundary is to be drawn between that and the political expression of fraternity (PEN 1934: np).

Some sense of the inadequacy of a writerly disengagement is evident: ‘There is no doubt about the friendship side of these gatherings. But is that all? I wish it could be. But suppose we find when we gather so genially and cordially that some has been left out, that a door has been barred to some guest we should have rejoiced to entertain?’

There is, for those who know the story in his reference to the then acclaimed but also persecuted German writer, Ernst Toller: ‘Last year there was a little difficulty in keeping the door open for *Toller*’. Ernst Toller was to commit suicide in 1940, shortly after reaching safety as a refugee in America. The story of Toller shows however that there are political ambivalences (to say the least) in the political and prejudicial leanings in the PEN – in the life of Wells himself. Thus a previously undiscovered letter from the first President of PEN, John Galsworthy, to the woman whose founding idea the PEN club was, Mrs Dawson-Scott, reveals Toller to the focus of Galsworthy’s anti-Semitic prejudices. These were revealed in the letter I uncovered in a long and extensive correspondence between President and Founder. The letter is written from New York.

FEB 1st 1926
C/O Charles Scribner’s
597 Fifth Avenue
New York City

Dear Mrs Dawson Scott,
... I’d to notice Toller was a Jew. That is by the way a point of policy to be borne in mind throughout PEN activities, that is: Not to have too much of the organisation in the hands of the Chosen or too many members of that Race otherwise we shall get a label, which won’t be beneficial to the Club at large. I’ve no prejudice whatever in that direction but our international wing must not get identified with the Jewish [ground?] of it. At present we’re alright, I think, but we must watch – this for your private ear.

John Galsworthy
(Third Acquisition PEN English Centre, Correspondence, Box 2, Galsworthy correspondence to Mrs Dawson Scott, archive, <http://www.hrc.utexas.edu/>)

Wells concludes: ‘When Politics reaches us and assaults Literature and the liberty of human thought and expression, we have to take notice of Politics. If not, what will the PEN club

become? A tourist agency – an organization for introducing respectable writers to useful scenery – a special branch of the hotel industry’ (PEN 1934: np).

Writing and the arts played an equally important political role in post-Revolutionary Russia. Trotsky’s (1925) *Literature and Revolution* delineated the writers’ role for the Soviets, dissolving pre-Revolutionary and capitalist models of individual self-expression to an emphasis upon the collective. The All-Russian Association of Proletarian Writers was part of this. It later formed the basis for the Union of Soviet Writers, formed by the Central Committee of the Communist Party on 23rd April, 1932. The first (1934) Congress of the Union of Soviet Writers demanded not only a particular literary style (Socialist Realism) but a political, that is revolutionary purpose to literature. Outside of either, writers were considered degenerate and counter-revolutionary:

Experimental and non-conformist writers such as Yevgeni Zamyatin, Isaac Babel, Boris Pilnyak, Nikolai Tikhonov, Mikhail Slonimski, Vsevolod Ivanov, Victor Serge, Vladimir Mayakovsky, Sergei Yesenin, Konstantin Fedin, Victor Shklovsky, Mikhail Zoshchenko and Alexander Solzhenitsyn suffered under the policy of Socialist Realism. Zamyatin and Serge managed to leave the country, whereas Mayakovsky and Yesenin committed suicide. Writers who refused to change, such as Babel and Pilnyak, were executed or died in labour camps (Geldern, 2015: np)

The 1934 Congress was all-compliant. Viktor Shklovskii questioned whether Dostoevsky would have met the new requirements of the Soviet State, while Isaac Babel declaimed the Congress had ‘invented a new genre, the genre of silence’ (Geldern, 2015). The Congress’s most infamous voice was Andrei Zhdanov, who conveyed Stalin’s chillingly mechanist vision for the Soviet aesthetic, that writers and artists were ‘engineers of the human soul’ (Garrard and Garrard, 1990, Geldern, 2015).

HG Wells’ lauding of the Soviet experiment was shared by many writers and intellectuals of the time, and was to some degree shared by PEN itself, PEN wishing since its inception to make convivial links to the Union of Soviet Writers, something which Wells approved:

A matter he [Wells] has very much at heart, the establishment of a liaison between the Union of Soviet Writers and the organization known as the international pen clubs, of

which he is president in succession to John Galsworthy. The PEN system exists for two main purposes – the maintenance of pleasant personal and social relations between writers and literary workers in different countries, sustained generally by dinners, visits, tours, excursions, an annual congress and so forth, and what is much more important, the practical assertion in every available way of the right of free expression and free publicity throughout the world ... Its members have long felt the desirability of getting into touch with Russian literary activities. They would like to see a Russian pen club established (PEN, 1934: np).

Not quite a communist ‘fellow traveller’ Wells was possibly the only member of PEN with sufficient standing amongst the Soviet hierarchy, Union of Soviet Writers, in part because of his *Russia in the Shadows*, he was unable to accept an invitation because of diary commitments. PEN never succeeded in doing so, links only being established in the early 1990s with the fall of the Soviet Union itself.

In 1934 Wells, if he could not attend a meeting with Union of Soviet Writers was able to meet Stalin, and in a classic edition of the Spectator magazine there is recorded an easily accessible account of a three hour conversation. The following short extract shows Wells stature as a writer in being able to engage with the dictator, and it shows how central education was in the thinking of the famous author and how much to fore in the mind of the dictator were the uses of and counter-revolutionary dangers of the intelligentsia:

STALIN: In order to achieve a great object, an important social object, there must be a main force, a bulwark, a revolutionary class. Next it is necessary to organize the assistance of an auxiliary force for this main force: in this case this auxiliary force is the Party, to which the best forces of the intelligentsia belong. Just now you spoke about "educated people;" But what educated people did you have in mind? Were there not plenty of educated people on the side of the old order in England in the seventeenth century, in France at the end of the eighteenth century, and in Russia in the epoch of the October Revolution? The old order: had in its service many highly educated people who defended the old order, who opposed the new order. Education is a weapon the effect of which be struck down. Of course, the proletariat, socialism, needs is determined by the hands which wield it, by who is to highly educated people. Clearly, simpletons cannot help the proletariat to fight for socialism, to build a new society. I do not underestimate the role of the intelligentsia; on the contrary, emphasize it. The question is, however, which intelligentsia are we discussing? Because there are different kinds of intelligentsia.

WELLS: There can be no revolution without a radical change in the educational system. It is sufficient to quote two examples: The example of the German Republic, which did not touch the old educational system, and therefore never became a

republic: and the example of the British Labour Party, which lacks the determination to insist on a radical change in the educational system (Wells, [1934]1937)

While Stalin's direct response to this is to focus on politics rather than pedagogy (the 'new political power,' says Stalin, 'creates the new laws, the new order, which is revolutionary order'), through the late 1930s Wells concentrates increasingly on educational matters. In 'The Informative Content of Education' Wells (1937) he asks: 'Do schools teach the facts that we must know to save ourselves, and our world, from chaos?' His answer is negative. Before the rise of Fascism and Nazism his bestselling and ambitious history of the world, Wells (1920; 1922) assertion that human history is held 'between education and catastrophe':

I have been keenly interested for a number of years, and particularly since the war, in public thought and public reactions, in what people know and think and what they are ready to believe. What they know and think and what they are ready to believe impresses me as remarkably poor stuff. A general ignorance - even in respectable quarters - of some of the most elementary realities of the political and social life of the world is, I believe, mainly accountable for much of the discomfort and menace of our times.

Wells' polemic, even diatribe, would be regarded as problematic, and the tone he frequently adopted even, perhaps especially in his later years accounted for a later neglect. Wells (1938) argues that the 'uninstructed public intelligence of our community is feeble and convulsive', it is 'a herd intelligence', it 'tyrannizes here and yields to tyranny there'. To Wells this was a failure of education: 'What is called elementary education throughout the world does not in fact educate, because it does not properly inform.' And he has undoubtedly an over-estimation of the significance of his own educational contributions. But it also revealed ambition. Thus the realisation of the inadequacy of elementary education, he writes, 'led to my taking an active part in the production of various outlines and summaries of contemporary knowledge'.

Borrowing his title from Thomas Paine's eighteenth book, Wells' work on human rights was written during the Second World War, based on decades of discussions with politicians, philosophers, world leaders, and particularly his involvement in the League of Nations.

Wells' political thinking helped shape the formation of the United Nations and the emphasis on politics and education evident in the Preamble of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948). *Experiment in Autobiography: Discoveries and Conclusions of a Very Ordinary Brain* (1934), an ironically titled and insightful work of a world-leading writer and intellectual, provides insight from the novelist and thinker on education, politics and the future of the planet and humanity. the Atlantic world' has been 'particularly successful in expedients for meeting this aspect of human nature', characterised by 'the method of the fundamental declaration', 'from Magna Carta onwards', this 'to provide a structural defence between the citizen and the necessary growth of central authority'.

In *The World Set Free* (1914) Wells wrote, 'Nothing could have been more obvious to the people of the early twentieth century than the rapidity with which war was becoming impossible. And as certainly they did not see it. They did not see it until the atomic bombs burst in their fumbling hands.' Wells lived to see the birth of the atomic age, and the bombing of Nagasaki and Hiroshima, only days before his death on 13 August 1946. Yet his political thinking of the time, as expressed in *A Modern Utopia*, hints less at socialism than fascism:

Most Utopias present themselves as going concerns, as happiness in being; they make it an essential condition that a happy land can have no history, and all the citizens one is permitted to see are well looking and upright and mentally and morally in tune. But we are under the dominion of a logic that obliges us to take over the actual population of the world with only such moral and mental and physical improvements as lie within their inherent possibilities, and it is our business to ask what Utopia will do with its congenital invalids, its idiots and madmen, its drunkards and men of vicious mind, its cruel and furtive souls, its stupid people, too stupid to be of use to the community, its lumpish, unteachable and unimaginative people? And what will it do with the man who is "poor" all round, the rather spiritless, rather incompetent low-grade man who on earth sits in the den of the sweater, tramps the streets under the banner of the unemployed, or trembles—in another man's cast-off clothing, and with an infinity of hat-touching—on the verge of rural employment? (Wells 1905: np)

His barely concealed eugenic programme becomes apparent:

These people will have to be in the descendant phase, the species must be engaged in eliminating them; there is no escape from that, and conversely the people of exceptional quality must be ascendant. The better sort of people, so far as they can be distinguished, must have the fullest freedom of public service, and the fullest

opportunity of parentage. And it must be open to every man to approve himself worthy of ascendancy (Wells 1905: np)

Much of this is rooted in a deep-seated pessimism about human nature:

The way of Nature in this process is to kill the weaker and the sillier, to crush them, to starve them, to overwhelm them, using the stronger and more cunning as her weapon. But man is the unnatural animal, the rebel child of Nature, and more and more does he turn himself against the harsh and fitful hand that reared him. He sees with a growing resentment the multitude of suffering ineffectual lives over which his species tramples in its ascent. In the Modern Utopia he will have set himself to change the ancient law. No longer will it be that failures must suffer and perish lest their breed increase, but the breed of failure must not increase, lest they suffer and perish, and the race with them (Wells 1905: np)

Wells' science fictions and his political engagements at the highest levels of world government, these many polymathic contributions, are the record of an extraordinary life and a body of work which influenced political opinion and to very small degree – with his many questionable, Fascist-leaning views on eugenics and so forth – influences still today in modelling human rights as a basis for open, free and economically as well as politically liberal systems of governance. In the life of this one writer we see a plethora of reciprocal influences between literature and politics, with the lived experience of an author demonstrating historical insights of still great contemporary import. Wells' engagements with PEN have particular relevance to our contemporary context where freedom of expression remains so pertinent.

Literary Lives, Political Philosophies, Public Education

That all of the totalitarian movements of the twentieth century saw literature and the arts in the shaping – and maintaining the shape – of political systems should provide some inklings of the power of literature whether of communistic or a fascistic-leaning, technologically enamoured modernistic hue (Adamson 2003), or simply progressive and preoccupied with very modern versions of freedom of expression (Author; Alexander 2005; Appignanesi, 2006).

In ‘Why I Write’, George Orwell (1946) identified ‘four great motives for writing, at any rate for writing prose’ – the egotistical, the aesthetic, the historical and the political. Using ‘political’ in ‘the widest possible sense’ by this he means to ‘[D]esire to push the world in a certain direction, to alter other people’s idea of the kind of society that they should strive after’ (Orwell 1946). It is this latter purpose with which Orwell most closely identified.

What Aron (1957) described as ‘the age of total war’ and Hobsbawm (1996) ‘the age of extremes’ (Hobsbawm 1996), Power (2007) ‘the age of genocide’ Isaac (2003) the era of the totalitarian Wells’ place in the midst of it all is an almost ideal coda for the potential for understanding the role of writer in relation to politics in modern times.

The idea of a contested relationship between authors and autocrats, writers and their dictators is as old as Plato’s expulsion of the poets from the Republic, and an abiding relationship between literature and politics (Author, 2015; Alexander, 2005; Booker, 2005; Jones, 2001; Kant, 2002; Karolides, Bald and Sova, 2004; Murray, 2000; Orwell, 1946; 2011). If as Hobsbawm rightly tells us all modern revolutions can be traced back to the French Revolution, an originating link between literature and politics to Rousseau himself. In an early prize-winning essay – a discourse on the respective merits of the arts and the sciences – submitted to the Academy of Dijon, the young Rousseau, much in the way Stalin would, castigates artists for a lack of concern with attention to matters pursuant of social justice (Rousseau 1750). Nussbaum (2012) might today disagree. In her influential and much cited *Not for Profit: Why Democracy Needs the Humanities*, Martha Nussbaum takes the contrary view, arguing it is the arts, humanities and literature which sustain and enrich not detract from democracy.

The link of literature to citizenship has been made in tangential terms by the (again perhaps somewhat mechanistic notion) of the ‘carriers’ of citizenship beyond institutional settings (Torney-Purta et al. 1999; also Amadeo et al. 2002). Here others add to Marshall’s (1950)

three citizenship domains of civil, political and social, Hébert and Sears (2001a, 2001b) – add a ‘cultural’ fourth (Hébert and Sears 2001a, 2001b: 1).

Yet such notions seem to do very little to the notion in terms of concrete definition, nor does it seem to imply anything more than a neutrality to the term ‘culture’. Any peripheral study of the cultural shows the notion to be not only of aesthetic contention but a function of political contestation. This is obvious not only in the case study of the life and work of H.G. Wells presented here but in all political discussions of the aesthetic: there is here no clearer dichotomy for example than that consciously elaborated contrast between Matthew Arnold’s *Culture and Anarchy* (where western culture is a bastion against barbarism) and Edward Said’s neatly inverted/ subverted *Culture and Imperialism* (where western culture is the purveyor of barbarism).

If focus on writers’ lives here makes some contribution by embodying some critical historical life accounts of one writer of extreme political turmoil to provide insights into the authorial negotiation, methodologically, archival research a productive supplementary here by generating new knowledge from primary source to round off, nuance or challenge with historical documents accepted assumptions, opinions, views.

Beyond the usefulness of primary documents however, out of the reach of many, the use of biographical and narrative methods in life history research can be extrapolated from the life and work of HG Wells as a case study of the literary-political interface which can be applied to other historical or contemporary contexts (Goodson et al. 2017). A ‘life trajectory’ approach is often used to penetrate to the surface of accounts of social to deeper-felt, more personal heartlands. Life trajectory research makes a particularly apt link between writers and politics because of its emphasis on narrative and story. Thus Bertaux (2001) notes: ‘life stories constitute a constant reminder of the existence and relevance for social life of the singularity of persons, of their historicity, of their acts and what they mean to them, they are

disturbing for sociology's project to eventually become a natural science' Bertaux (2001). The life trajectory approach applied to writers as a mirror to society is part of the wider dependence on language which is the essence of course of all qualitative research methods in the social sciences (Cohen, Manion, Morrison, 2011; Flick, 2014; Punch & Oancea, 2014; Robson, 2004), distinguishing, as Gadamer once put it, the framing of law and regulation in the natural sciences from the messier forms of knowledge which are part of human life and experience, the 'sociohistorical world': '... the specific problem the human sciences present to thought is that one has not rightly grasped their nature if one measures them by the yardstick of a progressive knowledge of regularity.' The life trajectory approach here, in focus on the life of Wells, with applicability to all writers, seeks 'to understand the phenomenon itself in its unique and historical concreteness' (Gadamer, 2014, 4).

Life trajectory research is more than an exploration of individual lives but life biographies in the value-forming political and societal contexts which are multi-levelled in ethical framing and political judgements at a personal scale (Baldwin, 2017; Bolen & Adams, 2017; Denzin, 2017; Hoonard, 2017; Reed, 2017; Vicars, 2017; also Andrews, 2017; Bolen & Adams, 2017; Phoenix, 2017; Plummer, 2017; Sandino, 2017; Squire, 2017; Tamboukou, 2017). The life trajectory research in this context is not merely the study of the individual lives of writers but insightful as to how writers are both formed by and help shape political discourse, and – if we are compare a perhaps trivial sounding comparison of book sales between fiction and political theory – have often no little significant influence over the lives of manifold others.

Conclusion

The link between literature and politics is as antique as it remains entrenched in those branches of philosophy and social theory that treat of polity and governance. The lives of

writers themselves here present *de facto* possibilities for examining this important nexus of the aesthetic and the political. Some minimal consideration of enrichment possibilities for teaching and learning in citizenship through life trajectory research would seem to fit the dual requirements of methodological rigour and pedagogical innovation. But it is a mere starting point of potential applications for a complex philosophy of education which draws on literary archives, literary and political life, all enmeshed in an idiosyncratic notion of public education. It would be fascinating to imagine how Wells might regard today's utter democratisation of knowledge and what one scholar has described as the death of expertise (Nichols 2017). I suspect with some no little degree of utter horror and dismay.

This article has used the life and work of H.G. Wells as an exemplar of possibilities at the interface of philosophy, literature and education. Wells's biography and his literary-political and indeed overtly educational output – not to mention his personal background in the teaching profession – provide in this sense an ideal case study. In documentary and archival terms, the article also suggests a method to supplement philosophers of education's rightful preoccupation with ideas and arguments. The literary or other forms of documentary archive can be seen here as a supplementary method in philosophy of education. Here it has provided illustrative evidence, then, in addition to a method in demonstrating the complex interface of (political) philosophy, literature and education in historically concrete ways. The very ambivalences and – in liberal democratic terms – sometimes shocking conclusions in Wells's political philosophy and political engagements, his very political philosophy of education itself, would seem merely to illustrate further or underline the rich if ethically entangled intellectual prospects for life trajectory research in philosophy which here touches a literary-political interface but which might extend across many disciplines.

Note

The PEN archives at the Ransom Research Center, presently unclassified, are arranged according to three distinct collections of materials. The first of the following contains extensive materials on H.G. Wells.

The first was acquired from PEN International, covers the years 1921–1972, and is catalogued on cards here in the Reading Room. The second is a smaller group of complementary records from PEN International. The third acquisition is from PEN English Centre and is as yet uncatalogued, described as follows: Records of the PEN English Centre: Minutes of Annual General Meetings (1926–1972), of the Executive Committee (1931–1970), and various subcommittees; general files of deceased or lapsed members; arrangements of speakers, etc. for regular meetings (approximately 1972–1996); planning and running Annual Writers Days (1979–1995); International Congresses in London (1956 and 1976) and in Cambridge (1988); selection and publication of *The Book of PEN*, *PEN Broadsheet*, and the *New Poems and New Stories* anthologies; administration and judging of Silver Pen, Katherine Mansfield and J. R. Ackerley Prizes; and correspondence. *Preliminary Inventory in Progress* (64 cartons, R15188).

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