

Robert Goddard Writing Commentary

Writing influenced Robert Goddard's career in two ways.

He often read fiction for relaxation, and his favorite author was H. G. Wells. In 1898, when Goddard was sixteen years old, he read Wells' newest novel, *War of the Worlds*. The idea of humans interacting with creatures from another planet stayed with him, and the following year he became so intrigued with the notion that he decided to devote his life to helping make interplanetary travel possible. In later years, he read all of Wells' novels, but each Christmas season, he reread *War of the Worlds*. He also enjoyed Jules Verne's novel *From the Earth to the Moon*, which told the story of people building a large cannon to shoot a spaceship carrying three people to the Moon.

In 1932, thirty-four years after he had first read *War of the Worlds*, Goddard wrote a letter to H. G. Wells, expressing his appreciation for the novel. He wrote that the book's "new viewpoints of scientific applications, as well as the compelling realism of the thing, made a deep impression. The spell was complete about a year afterward, and I decided that what might conservatively be called 'high-altitude research' was the most fascinating problem in existence." By this time, Goddard was working full time on rocket development. He wrote, "How many more years I shall be able to work on the problem, I do not know; I hope, as long as I live. There can be no thought of finishing, for 'aiming at the stars,' both literally and figuratively, is a problem to occupy generations, so that no matter how much progress one makes, there is always the thrill of just beginning." Four years later, he wrote to Wells again and sent him a copy of a report on his latest rocket research as a gift for the author's seventieth birthday.

Nonfiction writing was very important to Goddard's career too. He kept a daily diary all of his adult life, and he carefully documented his ideas and his research activities in a series of handwritten notebooks. Those records and several research reports he wrote are valuable resources for people to understand what problems he faced in rocket development and how he solved those problems. In 1903, he wrote in his notebook that "It is a very important thing to jot down suggestions that come into one's mind from time to time, as the thoughts that are most useful do not come at a bidding."

Goddard's ability to write clearly and persuasively also helped him obtain funding for his rocket research. For example, in 1916, he wrote a letter to the Smithsonian Institution asking for money to support his work. Dr. Charles Greely Abbot, who was acting head of the Smithsonian at that time, said it was "the best presentation of a research I had ever seen" and recommended the request be granted.

[Insert a description of the writing contest.]