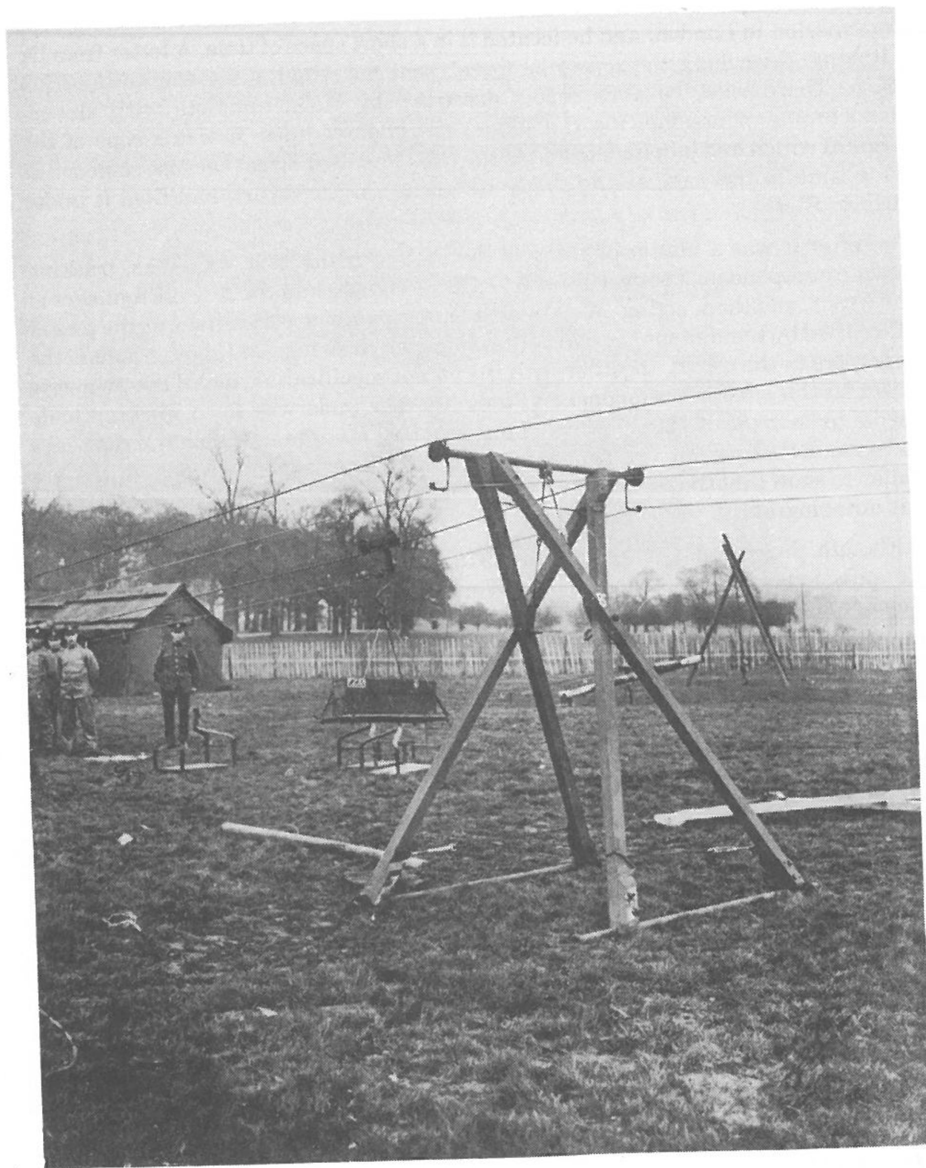

Second experimental line. Strong back and general view of line, reproduced with the assistance of the Public Record Office, Kew (document MUN 5†198†1660†13).

H.G. Wells at work (1894-1900): A Writer's Beginnings

Bernard Loing

Continued from last issue

Third Part: *Love and Mr. Lewisham*

Section I. The Genesis of the text: writing circumstances and state of the manuscript.

The genesis of *Lewisham* stretches over a period of four years, from mid-1896 to mid-1900, an inordinately prolonged effort with a single work for Wells, but necessary to achieve his first real novel. Yet, after a period of intense work on the first part (chapters I to VII), his creative effort seems to have become more sporadic, as he was engaged as usual in various other tasks; a first complete version was nevertheless ready in December 1898, and after futher revision, the story was published in book form in June 1900.

Composed of 526 sheets, a great part of which were loose and jumbled up, the manuscript had to be sorted out and reorganised: it could then be divided into seven successive series; three of them were pieced together from loose sheets and fragments, and remain somewhat hypothetical (series S2, S5, S6).

S1, the earliest draft now available, was apparently written in 1897; composed of 103 typewritten sheets with handwritten interpolations, it covers the second part of the story (chapters VIII to XX), which was then meant to be divided into 'books'. Some missing passages of the typewritten text, eliminated by Wells, show that he had already made drastic cuts in a much longer earlier version, now no longer extant: five chapters had been cut out; in these he was probably using autobiographical matter, considered afterwards as irrelevant. S1 contains a melodramatic episode later suppressed: the death of Lagune (chapter XIX), an unexpected event which was, at that early stage, to be the cause of Lewisham's marrying Ethel.

S2 is composed of 44 sheets (chapters XXIV to XXVI in Ed = the definitive version); it obviously belongs to a transitional period (May to July 1898), and Wells does not seem to know exactly how to end his story. But the narrative chronology is more explicit then than in the published version (Ed). In several unpublished passages, a deeper side of Lewisham is described: he experiences intense quasi-metaphysical loneliness, and practises a kind of religious meditation.

From S3 to S6 and Sx (the general series to which all other series more or less contribute), we see Wells at work on the last part of his novel (chapters XXVIII to XXXIII in Ed): S3, S4 and Sx were written in 1898, the shorter series S5 and S6 being partial revisions made in 1899. As a whole from S3 to Ed, the text will be developed, then gradually emended and shortened. The most interesting drafts are S3 (handwritten) and S4 (a typewritten copy of the same) which seem to be the earliest complete drafts for the end of the novel; in these series and later, the episode of the couple's quarrel and near divorce is brought into focus and becomes the

dramatic knot of the intrigue: abundant and numerous for that episode, the documents reveal Wells's unremitting effort to simplify the plot along lines of greater dramatic tension, to make it less formally structured and more credible, to build up the character of his hero and, in general, to leave 'unsaid' as many things as possible.

Two main versions of the conclusion and epilogue can be made out among the drafts: Wells seems to have hesitated between a realistic pessimistic epilogue — eventually discarded — in which Lewisham would not have resigned himself to his inglorious fate in matrimony, and the idealistic 'optimistic' epilogue of the novel in which he fully accepts his mediocre position — on account of his fatherhood — as a personal sacrifice to help mankind in its upward evolution.

On the whole the process of creation of *Lewisham* was long, sometimes uncertain, often difficult; the writing of this book was for Wells an initiation into the more intricate, but more prestigious genre of the realistic psychological novel.

Section II. *Lewisham*: The constitutive elements and principles.

Among the sources and other early texts that could be traced, the most interesting and directly influential is Wells's unknown short story 'How Gabriel became Thompson,' published anonymously in 1894 — and not yet itemized among his acknowledged short stories —, which provides the general framework of the plot.

On the other hand, the writing of *Lewisham*, a much more ambitious piece of work than all his previous stories and romances, shows how he applied the principles he was then formulating in his book reviews, as a literary critic for the *Saturday Review* (1895-97). Some principles of literary theory emerge from these articles. Among them, four points are particularly relevant here: 1) Wells's literary aesthetics is classical and founded on the principles of unity, symmetry and economy; 2) the novelist must have a code of ethics, based on the principle of sincerity; 3) he should have personally experienced his subject matter before writing about it; 4) for the novel as a genre, Wells favours a limited kind of naturalism tempered by humour.

In *Lewisham* Wells systematically applied his principles in matters of literary aesthetics: the text was endlessly pruned and cleared of any passages that might seem redundant, sometimes to reach a state of extreme ellipsis. The narrative struture is linear and hinges, for its interpretation, on a central chapter (Ed XXIII); the dramatic rhythm is regular, alternately tense and lax. *Lewisham* thus appears as a very classical and simple novel, with a single intrigue around a single hero, a strict tense system, a very limited number of 'stage' settings, symbolically suggestive of the hero's personality.

There is humour in the novel, though unevenly distributed. The humorous and sometimes ironical tone of the first part (Whortley episode) subsides into a half-serious, half-tender mood. Humour in *Lewisham* goes with movement and rhythm so that there is about it a flavour of the operetta, with the same conventional characters, situations and settings, especially in the Whortley episode. But this feature is also satirical and appears as an indirect criticism against the 'novelette,' a genre Wells will inveigh against later in the novel as well as in his reviews.

According to his principles, Wells has also given particular care to the writing of the dialogues. Half of the text is written in direct style, a much larger proportion than in the scientific romances and tales; and the drafts reveal that the most painstaking efforts were reserved for the most commonplace kind of dialogue, that which shapes the deeper mental structure of the characters. On the other hand, the satirical, or emphatic, dialogues — with occasional declamatory passages — are easily written, but without always keeping the necessary critical gap between the writer and his text.

Section III. Autobiography and self-portrait in *Lewisham*.

Whereas at the end of his career, Wells advocated autobiography as the superior form of the novel, he rejected it at the beginning. However, in *Lewisham* he made full use of autobiographical matter and, from the start, the novel was rightly considered by the public as autobiographical. It is indeed easy to ascertain that most events of the story — apart from the reconciliation — were drawn from Wells's adolescent years, his student years at South Kensington and his first marriage. The relations between the main characters have indeed the same source: Ethel plays the part of Wells's first wife and Miss Heydinger has features of the second. In fact, *Lewisham* can be seen as the first chapter in a long autobiography to which most novels by Wells will contribute.

But beyond the use of proven facts, the autobiographical nature of the work is attested by several specific textual clues: the story beginning "ten years ago" (i.e. at a time when Wells was actually at South Kensington), the occasionally unexpected uses of a present tense for the narration, the hint — irrelevant in its context — at Lewisham's family ties, the implicit identification between the hero and his author by means of memories that belong rather to the latter.

Like Lewisham, most characters have an autobiographical origin. The drafts even bear trace of Mrs Wells's direct interest in the creation of the female characters; in the case of Miss Heydinger, she almost seems to have guided her husband's pen. Yet a few secondary characters are defined outside the autobiographical frame: they either belong to the conventional world of the operetta or of light comedy, or else are reminiscent of the fantastic cast of the scientific romances.

At a deeper level, the novel can be interpreted as its author's self-portrait. Everything in the book is seen through the eyes of Lewisham, whose physical existence, on the other hand, remains tenuous. He is often nothing but a purely subjective point of view upon the world, a sort of invisible man. At that level of interpretation, the discarded epilogue already mentioned clearly shows that the novel is to be read as the self-portrait of a schizoid, "a man divided against himself." Indeed, Lewisham is in perpetual conflict, both with himself — the central theme of the book being the inner conflict between love and ambition — and with the world. The self-portrait must also include the character of Chaffery, organically related to that of Lewisham as a sort of complementary other half. The quest for one's identity thus appears as the underlying theme of the novel, as it often was in Wells's previous books; but although the story avowedly deals with Lewisham's quest for reality, Wells's own answer is rather, in the end, to reject reality and escape into dreamland, as he will later into utopia.

Section IV. Reality and Illusion in *Lewisham.*

Lewisham is generally labelled as a 'realistic' novel, but its realism is in fact limited; at the time, Wells had just been practising a combination of 'realism' and 'romance,' and was advocating for the novel a subjective kind of realism, coloured with humour. Moreover, two inner features of this novel prevent it from being completely realistic: one is the presence of doublets, or symmetrical situations which organize the plot according to a sort of geometrical pattern; the other is the theatre-like quality of the novel, with the staging of its characters, the stage-like settings, the scenic effects; that impression prevails in the first part, but can still be felt in later chapters, where characters sometimes deliver real speeches, and at the end of the book with the emphatically ambiguous use of the word "Play".

The novel tells explicitly of a quest for reality. But in the end, the only character in it that meets with any measure of success is Chaffery, whose function is to point at illusion rather than at reality. Though outside the main dramatic stream, that essential character is himself unsubstantial, reduced to a voice uttering the glib speech of the Tempter, so that with him, the novel takes on the overtones of a Morality play. His final success is that of glibness, facility and contempt for the rules; in a way it symbolizes Wells's vengeful and implicit defence of his former work which he was himself trying to break away from — if not to denounce — by writing *Lewisham.*

Thus in spite of an apparent rupture, there is continuity from *The Time Machine* to *Lewisham*, from the romances and short stories, to the novels. But the former works, more easily written and more inspired, have a kind of 'miraculous' quality, which the novels lack.

A Landmark in Wells Scholarship

Patrick Parrinder

H.G. Wells à l'oeuvre: Les débuts d'un écrivain (1894-1900). By Bernard Loing, Paris (Didier Erudition) 1984, 566pp.

The H.G. Wells Collection at the University of Illinois contains, among much other material, the manuscripts of no less than forty of Wells's major fictional works. When Bernard Loing arrived there, he found that only two of these bundles of manuscript had been fully researched. David Y. Hughes had completed an unpublished PhD thesis on *The War of the Worlds*, while Harris Wilson had published a complete novel by Wells, *The Wealth of Mr Waddy*, found among the rejected drafts of *Kipps*. In addition, the existence of several early published versions of a third book, *The Time Machine*, was well-known, though in this case the manuscripts themselves had not been studied in depth. Trained in the procedures of 'textual genetics,' Dr Loing set to work to trace the compositional history of three crucial early novels, *The Time Machine, The Island of Doctor Moreau* and *Love and Mr Lewisham.* The bare bones of his discoveries have been set out in his two-part article published in the *Wellsian.* Nevertheless, to understand the full flavour as well as the full import of Dr Loing's work — for it is as much a labour of love as a labour of scholarship — one must turn to his extended study of the genesis of these three novels, presented initially as a French doctoral thesis and now published as *H.G. Wells à l'oeuvre.*

Dr Loing begins with a quotation from Edgar Allen Poe's remarkable essay on 'The Philosophy of Composition.' Poe speaks of the reluctance of most writers to let the public take a "peep behind the scenes" at the "elaborate and vacillating crudities of thought," the "painful erasures and interpolations" and the "innumerable glimpses of idea that arrived not at the maturity of full view," which constitute the process of literary creation. Wells, of all writers, might be seen as sharing this reluctance; his manner of working (it has been said) was impatient and hasty, he was contemptuous of formal boundaries and compositional rules and he regarded many of his finished works as makeshift, shoddy and ill-judged. In letters to Henry James he spoke of his own books as "abortions" and "wastepaper baskets"; even if ironically meant, such terms are calculated to discourage closer scrutiny of the works to which they refer. And yet there is another side to the question. We know that Wells arduously wrote and rewrote some of his books, especially the earlier ones. In several cases — notably *The Time Machine* and *When the Sleeper Wakes* — he undertook a thorough revision of the work *after* its first publication. His autobiography is far from reticent about his literary labours. And, finally, he did not destroy his manuscripts — as any merely hasty or careless writer would have done — but left them in a state in which they were certain to be preserved, so that one day their compositional secrets might be laid bare.

The objects of Dr Loing's study are critical and biographical rather than narrowly textual. That is, his aim in studying the early drafts of a particular novel is to arrive at a fuller appreciation of the finished work, as well as a better understanding of the