

Chapter Seven has many helpful things to say about Wells's utopian writings and considers to what degree we should take their ideas as concrete proposals, as mere flights of fancy or something inbetween. The final two chapters examine Wells's legacy, first focusing on the science fiction of Zamyatin (*We*) and Orwell (1984), then taking an overview of how science fiction has developed in the last hundred years, concluding (rather tentatively, given its visionary subject) with some thoughts on how it might change after "the ferment of cosmological thinking at the end of the twentieth century".

With these last chapters, the book attains escape velocity and blasts out of the orbit of the academic, gaining, as it does so, in pace and in narrative linearity. Given that the opening chapters are the most abstract and discursive, I cannot help wondering whether the non-academic reader wouldn't find it easier to begin with Chapter Nine and work backwards to Chapter One. The author portrays himself as a time traveller: "I use *The Time Machine* as my base to explore a literary and cultural landscape in widening circles." Perhaps in the landscape of Wells's imagination, and in the present literary climate where, we are told, readers have a moral obligation to seize control of texts from authors, the reverse journey would be an equally legitimate one.

From whichever side you approach it, Patrick Parrinder's knowledge of Wells's work, and of many related fields of study, surely deserves that overused word "encyclopaedic." His writing is as succinct and precise as ever. This is a book which will, indeed, cast its shadow into the future: I venture to prophesy that students of Wells will be reading it for a long time to come.

Michael Sherborne

Wells as Truth-teller

Michael Foot. H.G.: The History of Mr Wells. London: Doubleday, 1995. pp. 305 £20.00

Michael Foot's biography of H.G. Wells has been eagerly awaited by Wells enthusiasts, and it lives up to expectations. Those of us who attended the 1993 AGM were lucky enough to hear the author explain that he had decided to write the book because of his life-long attachment to Wells's writings and enthusiasm for his ideas,

and also because as he puts it in the Preface: "I had a unique and, I trust, instructive glimpse into the world of H.G. Wells and Rebecca West" (ix).

One of the outstanding features of *The History of Mr Wells* is the lucidity and directness of its style – an aspect of Wells's writings which Michael Foot returns to a number of times, making links with his and HG's passion for Jonathan Swift. Another striking feature is a copious use of direct quotation from Wells's writings. This works well in the opening sections of the book, where passages from *Experiment in Autobiography* and from the early journalism allow Wells to tell his own story, but less well in the chapters which look at him as a novelist. Although Michael Foot gives full credit to HG's originality, to his imaginative verve and literary energy, it could be argued that the quotation of extraordinarily lengthy passages from novels such as *The Passionate Friends* without detailed analysis and exposition does little to justify these claims.

The book argues effectively against the claims advanced in several recent "lives" that H.G. Wells was a racist, and few readers could finish this biography and accept the accusation that he was in any way a misogynist. It seems clear that Wells was a very engaging figure, and there seems no doubt about his attractiveness. But although Foot concedes at the end of the book that Wells's liking for women "did not make him a feminist or even an unqualified champion of women's rights" (306) there is, nevertheless, a tendency throughout the book to downplay anti-feminist attitudes – see the throwaway comment on Mrs (sic) Miniver, for instance (112) – and to ascribe a feminist aspect to Wells's fictional women which is not borne out by their prominence or role in the texts; far from being the "raging advocates of a liberation to match anything elsewhere on the political horizon" (112) that Foot suggests, most are portrayed only in relation to, and generally through the eyes of, the men in their lives. Rebecca West's review of Mary Justin's complaints in *The Passionate Friends* sums up Wells's limitations in this respect brilliantly: "the woman who is acting the principal part in her own ambitious play," she writes, "is unlikely to weep because she is not playing the principal part in some man's no more ambitious play" (Victoria Glendinning, *Rebecca West: A Life*, part 2). Perhaps, too, Michael Foot is too ready to accept Wells's own account of his love life, mistaking candour for authenticity. This is particularly evident in the account of Wells's relationship with Elizabeth von Arnim, an affair which is recounted very differently in her papers

But the majority of this biography is devoted to Wells's public life and his political ideas, and here I found myself accepting its judgements. It could be argued that the

book gains momentum as it proceeds. The chapters on the twenties and thirties, and on Wells's final years, carry considerable conviction, possibly because they cover the years in which Michael Foot knew Wells, Rebecca West and Moura Budberg personally, and because they deal with events and issues in which he too was involved. *H.G.: The History of Mr Wells* offers a forceful and convincing case for its subject as a socialist and humanist, and presents a sustained argument for what the author sees as HG's "pre-eminent quality: his absolute dedication as a writer to telling the truth" – and, moreover it is seen as a virtue that "What he himself saw as the truth was constantly changing..." (154). The whole of Wells's life, says Michael Foot, was in fact a search for truth, and after reading this book the reader is in no doubt that this is also the aim of the biographer.

Sylvia Hardy

Aims and Functions of the Society

The H.G. Wells Society was founded in 1960, and has members in over twenty countries. It aims to promote widespread interest in the life, work and thought of Herbert George Wells.

Publications

The Society publishes an annual journal and a newsletter. A fourth, revised and enlarged edition of its comprehensive Wells bibliography was issued in 1986. A collected edition of Wells's last two books, *The Happy Turning* and *Mind at the End of its Tether*, edited by G.P. Wells, was published in 1968 and reissued as a paperback in 1982. *The Discovery of the Future* (together with the *Commonsense of World Peace* and *The Human Adventure*), edited by Patrick Parrinder appeared in 1989. *Select Conversations with an Uncle (Now Extinct)* with *Two Hitherto Unreprinted Conversations*, edited by David C. Smith and Patrick Parrinder, with a foreword by Michael Foot, was published in 1992, and other reprints are currently in preparation. Copies of *Human Rights and World Order* by James Dilloway, published in 1983 to mark the fortieth anniversary of Wells's *Rights of Man*, are also available.

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