one. He is read, his books are loved and admired, and although there will never be another H. G. Wells his spirit lives on. As I say, I do not think the mature Wells would have found much of interest in science fiction, but the youthful spirit in him – the spirit of those last magical years of the nineteenth century – would have responded happily to the knowledge that there is today a large number of writers, both here and in other countries, who are trying to do in their way what he did in his.

H.G. Wells, Writer or Thinker? From Science Fiction to Social Prophecy

by J.P. VERNIER September 1978

My title is obviously paradoxical, implying as it does an opposition between "writer" and "thinker", as though we did not recognize that H. G. Wells was evidently both. However, it is a fact that his contemporary reputation largely depended on whether he was considered mainly as a novelist or as a social and political reformer. His views on social and political matters exerted a major influence on the intelligentsia of the Edwardian epoch and, although he lost a great part of his audience in the twenties and in the thirties, even then he was still considered as one of the shapers of modern thought. The preceding statement should be qualified since, to many intellectuals of the thirties he appeared as an exploded humbug both as a writer and as a thinker: a novelist who was unable to follow the evolution of the novel and insisted on being considered as a journalist, a thinker whose apocalyptic warnings to the world reminded one either of the tantrums of a fretful child or of the preaching of a belated Victorian Radical. At his death in 1946, most critics agreed that he was one of the major figures of his time and yet they generally found it very difficult to assess the nature of his achievement. David Lodge summed up the situation very clearly:

> **At his death in 1946 Wells was a discredited thinker; as a novelist he was allowed the doubtful honour of having fathered "science fiction", but was remembered chiefly as the creator of engaging but light-weight sub-Dickensian comedies of lower middle-class manners. (1)**

Since then, the wind has changed and Wells's reputation as a writer has grown steadily: we now know that the image of Wells as a man who wrote too much too quickly and therefore paid little attention to the language he used, was as much a cliché as the familiar portrait of Wells as an inveterate optimist and a naive apostle of technological progress. Yet the nature and value of his thought remain more doubtful: was he a popularizer of notions that are now part and parcel of our cultural background or was he a genuine original thinker? It is difficult to answer this question mainly because there was little system in Wells's thought: he had two or three basic ideas which he kept presenting under different lights, and they were ideas born not of a rational process of thinking but of instinctive likes and dislikes. This is not a reflection on their validity: reason is not often a very efficient tool when it comes to putting across social and political ideas, but it does help the critic to trace a pattern behind a thinker's utterances.

In this paper I am not primarily concerned with evaluating Wells's thought; what I should like to discuss is a more limited but rather intriguing question which could be stated thus: "Why and under what circumstances did Wells decide to devote his attention to social and political problems?" To put things more bluntly, had Wells written nothing after the turn of the century, he would undoubtedly be remembered as the author of some of the most remarkable science fiction ever written, but it is doubtful if we would be here now to discuss "Social Change and H. G. Wells" because till the turn of the century, his concern with social problems had been very slight indeed. There were few reasons to believe that, some years later, Wells would become the prophet of the World State and a major public figure. And yet a very important shift took place in his career: he apparently decided, if not to give up the writing of scientific fantasies entirely, at least to try and base his reputation on two different kinds of writing: on the one hand, essays and speculative works in which the future development of society was to be examined scientifically; on the other, novels that were to hold up a mirror to the evolution of contemporary society. Among the former we find works like *Anticipations*, *Mankind in the Making*, *First and Last Things*, etc. ....; in the latter, a series of novels starting with *Love and Mr. Lewisham*, developing into Wells's most ambitious attempt at portraying Edwardian society in *Tono-Bungay*, and gradually becoming more and more tinged with political propaganda. These two trends ran parallel in his career for over a decade and were gradually fused together in order to become parts of a single effort geared towards the foundation of the World State. I would suggest that, between 1900 and the beginning of the First World War, Wells hesitated between fiction and social prophecy and finally decided to make fiction subservient to his ideological schemes. His scientific fantasies were to be gradually pushed into the background, although they never disappeared completely.

That Wells's interest in the problem of social change developed rather late – he was thirty-five when *Anticipations* was published and he had already acquired a flattering reputation in the field of science fiction – is all the more surprising as he was himself an extreme example of the consequences of this change. In his *Experiment in Autobiography* he vividly portrays the modifications undergone by Bromley during his childhood and adolescence, the transformation of a rural community into a small town that was to become part of the ever-widening metropolis. Through his father's unfortunate business venture he discerned the fate of thousands of small shopkeepers unable to keep pace with the development of modern commerce. His own education at the Imperial College of Science was largely a consequence of rapidly changing social conditions; yet, what is striking about him during those formative years is a dual movement away from social problems and the conditions of daily life. One the one hand, the young Wells took refuge in the obsolescent social structure of Up Park; on the other, he attempted to escape from everyday realities by an imaginative exploration of the huge vistas opened up by science, particularly by evolutionism. At Up Park he found a closed world in which social relationships were still based on the master/servant relationship of the eighteenth century, a

world regulated by strictly hierarchical principles. As he put it in *Tono-Bungay*.

> In that English country-side of my boyhood every human being had a 'place'. It belonged to you from your birth like the colour of your eyes, it was inextricably your destiny. (2)

It is true that these rules implied a curtailment of individual freedom and that he found it particularly irksome to abide by them, but they did represent an apparently impregnable bulwark against change. They were inherited from an age when change meant a disruption of the natural order of things and we shall see that, years later, Wells's attitude to change remained highly ambiguous. At the same time, this closed world of Up Park provided him with an opening he had found nowhere else: there was a library from which books could be secretly borrowed, and these opened the boundless world of the imagination.

This is exactly what science was to do for him at South Kensington. Throughout his life Wells insisted on the importance which T. H. Huxley's courses in biology had on the shaping of his mind, but it is highly probable that this influence exerted itself essentially on his creative mind: practically all his scientific fantasies are based on the fictional development of scientific propositions. Abstract concepts were immediately turned into images which led to imaginary concrete situations. However, when these scientific fantasies are examined closely, they are seen to contain the germ of Wells's evolution at the turn of the century.

From a practical angle, they enabled him to escape from the fate that otherwise might have been his, either as a shop-assistant or as a schoolmaster in some second-rate establishment; they brought him financial independence but not the kind of literary reputation he sought. Their success was indeed great but not overwhelming, and although this may be hard to realize nowadays, it tended to establish him as a writer of romance. It was romance of a new kind, but nonetheless romance, a genre which was not wholly respectable and was not likely to bring him the sort of fame he wanted. From the book reviews he wrote for the *Saturday Review* between 1894 and 1897 we know that the young Wells was not interested in scientific matters only, but had very clear ideas about what good literature signified. The fact that he was to claim so often that he was a journalist and nothing more, makes it easy to forget that, in the last decade of the nineteenth century, the writers he admired most were Flaubert, Turgueniev and Sterne, and that he was one of the first critics to recognize the genius of Conrad and Gissing. If he wanted to become their equal, he had to write novels, and novels, to him, always meant fiction intended to mirror the destiny of one or several individuals within a given social framework. Whatever their merits, scientific fantasies just would not do.

But even more important was the fact that science fiction led him into a sort of dead end, and that he was left facing a dilemma from which he could not extricate himself. First of all, the scientific ideologies on which his creative imagination fed were contradictory: on the one hand, Darwinian evolutionism opened up enormous vistas – if Man had come from such a remote past to what heights could he not rise in the future? But, on the other, Wells was as equally convinced that, whatever mankind did, the earth was inevitably going towards its end: there was no way to prevent the gradual cooling of the sun and the death of our planet. Darwin had opened up the future; Lord Kelvin and the Second Law of Thermodynamics had shown that this future could not go on and on indefinitely and that the end was inevitable. Thus man could reach to the stars only to find that, in the end, he was bound to disappear, not only as an individual but also as a species. Now, this sort of contradiction could easily be solved at the level of writing, since fiction has a coherence of its own that has little to do with the world of hard facts. What mattered to the writer of science fiction was the *reality of change* and the use he could make of this reality at the fictional level. The Time Traveller can witness the end of the world at a time when the only living creatures left on the earth are giant crabs: what the reader remembers is the forcefulness of the writing that conveys this extraordinary vision. The Elois and the Morlocks may be presented as descendants of modern man: they become parts of a very rich and complex symbolic pattern which may satisfy the most fastidious reader but in which he can hardly feel personally involved. The village in which the Invisible Man wreaks havoc is inhabited by stock characters familiar to any reader of nineteenth and even eighteenth century fiction; the Home Counties devastated by the Martians – descendants of Man again – have apparently not been touched by social change either. The reader is a mere observer of certain stages in the natural evolution of the world; he perceives no social change, no change on a human scale, because such change would be insignificant in the immense panorama of biological evolution. This was in fact a problem of perspective: the writer's vision could not be focused on the individual and the species at the same time. What apparently fascinated the imagination of the young Wells was the vision of man not as a social animal but as a biological type. This appears clearly in the vocabulary he used when he gave this definition of man:

> A man is a specimen of a species of social animal – plus a specimen of some sort of culture, plus a slight personal difference. (3)

In other words, in his fiction, evolution conflicted with social change, and it is easy to see why: natural evolution is so slow that it cannot be perceived except as illustrated by a series of concrete scenes selected along the time-axis. The Time Traveller has to stop his machine in order to find out what has become of the world: the fictional representation of evolution is made up of a number of points along the narrative line; it thus emphasizes the notion of space at the expense of time. It is also true that, whenever Wells came up against the problem of social change in his science fiction he dealt with it in a very ambiguous way. Let us take two examples: in *A Story of the Days to Come* (1899) the world we are shown is characterized by remarkable technological changes but the psychological elements used to keep the plot moving are extraordinarily clumsy: the two young protagonists are separated by their parents who object to their union on grounds of social incompatibility. In a world of huge cities and flying machines people still behave in the most traditional Victorian fashion. In *The Sleeper Awakes* (1899), Ostrog, the dictator who dreams of taking control of the whole planet, sees social change as the extermination of the weaker people in the name of natural evolution:

> It is the way that change has always travelled. Aristocracy, the prevalence of

the best – the suffering and extinction of the unfit, and so to better things. (4)

Social change seems here equated with natural change in a way which suggests a confusion between nature and man. If this was the way natural change worked, obviously the future of man was very grim indeed.

In fact, it may have been a sense of this grimness that led Wells to become interested in social problems and to turn to political prophesying.

First of all, he had to find a way out of the dilemma underlying his science fiction: if mankind was doomed to disappear, what was the point of trying to alter *The Shape of Things to Come* ? But, then life was meaningless: a conclusion Wells always found inacceptable. The solution he found was extremely ingenious if not entirely ingenuous: the end of the world, he postulated, was a fact that could not be altered but it would take place in such a distant future that the human mind was unable to span such a vast time-scale. To the human observer man could still evolve towards a future that would be pure sweetness and light if only he decided to alter the course of natural evolution through a collective effort of the will. This was a meaningful and exhilarating goal for mankind, a goal situated within the limits of human time, and this is the discovery made by the protagonists of most of the novels he wrote just before the outbreak of the First World War. The main implication of this shift of point of view was a change in the scale of the future events considered. The younger Wells was interested in the shape of the man of the year 1,000,000; the social prophet would consider the future: the coming decades or, at most, the new century. In other words, *society* gradually superseded the concept of the *species*: the latter could give rise to extraordinary visions but was not likely to lead to action; society, on the other hand, was a reality that could be directly apprehended and possibly altered at will.

As we have seen, the transition from the Victorian to the Edwardian age, corresponding as it did to a change of century, was paralleled by a shift in Wells's outlook. He had to escape from the world of romance if he wanted to become a major public figure, and he could follow two different paths. He could turn to the novel proper, or he could give up fiction to write essays of a political and philosophical nature. In the end he wrote both, eventually trying to fuse the two genres in his "discussion-novels". The coming of the new century saw a wave of speculation about the future – *Anticipations* was not the first book of its kind at the time – and Wells was not long in following the trend. In fact, at the very end of the nineteenth century, critics had already urged him to broaden the scope of his interests. Here is, for example, the conclusion of an unsigned review of *The Island of Doctor Moreau* published in the *Manchester Guardian* on 14th April 1896:

Yet, great as is the ability and pronounced as is the success of this book, we are convinced that Mr. Wells is too strong and original a writer to devote himself exclusively to fantastic themes. (5)

During the first two decades of our century we see him gradually moving away from the huge visions born of natural evolution and towards a consideration of man in society. Cosmic change gave way to social change and what was for Wells its indispensable corollary: change in the individual's mentality. Similarly, the powers of his imagination were gradually curtailed and replaced by intellectual speculation. Wells seems, in fact, to have felt some diffidence towards the creative imagination and to have attempted to achieve a new balance by dealing with social reality.

I should now like to examine more closely the two faces of this change:
(1) his picture of social reality in novels rooted in the Victorian tradition (the example I have chosen is *Tono-Bungay* which may well be his most significant novel in this field);
(2) his speculations on social change and the need to alter the future, as they are expressed in several essays of that time.

Novels, as distinct from romances, were to be, for Wells, the main means of reaching fame in the realm of literature. In a very traditional manner they were to represent the story of an individual's life as determined by certain social circumstances, during a certain span of time: Wells could not conceive characters except as framed by or reacting against social circumstances. Whether man was considered as a biological specimen or as a social animal made little difference: the individual was always the representative of forces larger than himself. As Wells himself put it:

There are those who believe entirely in the individual man and those who believe entirely in the forces behind the individual man; and for my own part, I must confess myself a rather extreme case of the latter kind. (6)

(7) *Tono-Bungay* was an attempt at identifying the forces at work not only behind the individual man but essentially behind the social evolution that had led to the Edwardian present. Wells was using fiction to tell his readers: This is the world we live in; it is like this because we have let change happen indiscriminately, and if we want the future to be different we had better start taking steps to control this process of change.

How did Edwardian society appear to George Ponderevo, Wells's narrator and main protagonist? Essentially as a diseased society abandoned to a wild growth. Several critics have remarked on this peculiar aspect of Wells's imagery and it would be pointless to deal with this side of the book at great length. More interesting is the fact that this society represents the outcome of a historical evolution which is itself characterized by a succession of stages apparently independent of human will. Whenever George Ponderevo considers the past which has shaped the present, he sees this past as made up of a series of predetermined phases: just as the individual was presented as shaped by external forces, contemporary society was shown as the product of historical evolution. At no moment are we made to feel that things *could* have happened differently, which means that very little import-

ance attaches to political movements. This, for a man who was to pass as a social reformer, was a rather strange conclusion, but Wells's view of positive change was never based on political considerations but on the notion of mental change in individuals. The evolution which led to the creation of the Edwardian scene is presented as an uncontrolled process responsible for the waste and chaos characterizing this period: what has happened is that, in all fields and at all levels, new elements have been added on to the existing ones, thus destroying an original harmony. The London suburbs are a good example of this type of unplanned development, under which no pattern of intention is visible. In society new types of people have appeared: financiers, often of foreign origin, taking over the land that once belonged to the gentry; immigrants impervious to English traditions; workers brought from one end of the country to the other. The same kind of rapid unplanned change takes place in the world of business, but, in all cases, what matters is that the old structures have not been superseded but have been added on to, so that outward appearances, dating from a century or two, still exist although they correspond to a conception of the world that has become completely obsolete. The consequences of this state of affairs were, in Wells's eye, considerable: because of this unaltered front the majority of people were unaware of the changing process endlessly going on. They still considered the world as the familiar eighteenth century piece of clockwork. Hence their complacency which blinded them to the consequences of this process.

To most people the reality of change appears when it is too late to do anything about it. Consider the way in which, in *Tono-Bungay* , the vicar realizes the damage done to Crest Hill. The vocabulary borrowed from the realm of military endeavours is particularly significant:

He had kept the truth from his mind a long time, but that morning it had forced its way to him with an aspect that brooked no denial that this time it was not just changes that were coming in his world, but that all his world lay open and defenceless, conquered and surrendered, doomed as far as he could see, root and branch, scale and form alike to change. (8)

Far from considering social change as an element of human progress, Wells saw it as a process of disintegration of the existing forces and values. Yet, the very fact that change meant movement was positive since disintegration could be seen as the indispensable first step towards the reconstruction of the world along lines that *would* ensure the progress of mankind. This is what George Ponderevo discovers on his first visit to London:

The whole illimitable place teemed with suggestions of indefinite and sometimes outrageous possibility, of hidden but magnificent meanings.

Finding out these "hidden but magnificent meanings", pointing them out to his readers, was what Wells intended to do at the time. "Meaning" was always a key-word with Wells and, just as he welcomed change as a means of escape from obsolete and frustrating conventions, so he dreaded it as the possible harbinger of chaos. In this respect, he

certainly had a lot in common with the Victorians: change was to mean a new kind of order and had to be strictly controlled since it could not be left to the blind haphazard forces of natural evolution. His scientific fantasies had been attempts at imagining what would eventually happen if nature were left to its own devices or rather lack of devices. The new century, with all the opportunities it seemed to offer, turned him into a prophet. In our age of media it is difficult to realize the importance which people like Shaw, Chesterton, Belloc and Wells had until the development of the radio put an end to their function. Wells undoubtedly saw himself as the mouthpiece of modern consciousness at the time, the spokesman of those younger generations that were to be mown down on the European battlefields a few years later. His decision to join the Fabian Society and his involvement in various important issues of the time clearly reflect an attempt at becoming a public figure, one of the main contemporary intellectual leaders.

Being a novelist was simply not enough for him. Or, to be more precise, being a novelist was a function that could not be divorced from life, and gradually he reached the conclusion that the novel was meant to expound and discuss ideas in dialogue form. By 1900 it was clear that prophecy was to be one of Wells's favourite occupations in the years to come. This shift he justified in an interesting footnote at the beginning of *Anticipations*:

Fiction is necessarily concrete and definite: it permits of no open alternatives; its aim of illusion prevents a proper amplitude of demonstration, and modern prophecy should be, one submits, a branch of speculation and should follow with all decorum the scientific method. (10)

Wells's meaning is particularly clear: he opposes the illusion created by fiction to the scientific demonstration of prophecy. Now, all readers of Wells know that, whenever he uses such phrases as 'the scientific method' or 'the scientific mind' to justify any of his statements it is a sign that he felt on rather unsafe ground. And it is quite significant to find Wells, at the turn of the century, playing down fiction and extolling the virtues of prophecy as a scientific activity:

The man of science comes to believe at last that the events of the year A. D. 4000 are as fixed, settled and unchangeable as the events of the year 1600. Only about the latter he has some material for belief, and about the former — practically none. (11)

Wells is here assuming that words like 'science' or 'scientific' will endow his prophesying with seriousness and respectability and it seems to me that this was all the more necessary as he was in fact caught in a network of contradictions that could hardly be reconciled, except at the level of fiction. Social change, we have seen, had to be controlled in order to ensure the harmonious development of society and satisfy the aims of the species. But social change, in Wells's eye, depended on the evolution of the individual: the basic idea behind Wells's consideration of the future was that there existed in nature some mysterious purpose which man was to serve, although he was not equipped to under-

stand it. Each individual was to become aware of the existence of this purpose and then to put himself entirely at its service, that is, to lose all identity in order to achieve a merging of self in a collective will. In other words, social change had nothing to do with classes (in *A Modern Utopia* the division of society into classes depends on the different individuals' ability and willingness to subserve their egoes to the requirements of the collective purpose); it was a matter of personal change based on what was an act of faith rather than a scientific conclusion. When Wells posed as a champion of socialism he used the word in a very peculiar sense: it had nothing to do with economics, politics or democracy; it meant the service to this purpose whose existence depended on Wells's intimate conviction that there was something beautiful and noble in man because, otherwise, life would not be bearable:

> Socialism for me is a common step we are all taking in the great synthesis of human purpose. It is the organization, in regard to a great mass of common and fundamental interests that have hitherto been dispersedly served, of a collective purpose. (12)

I would suggest that, originally, Wells's conversion to social prophecy was a step dictated by the fear of a godless future and the awareness of man's vulnerability in the natural scheme of things. His science fiction had explored various hypotheses all culminating in apocalyptic visions emphasizing the fragility of man's existence; he knew that, some day, our planet must become a dead world; and he had to find a way out of this dilemma, a means of asserting that life was worth living in spite of all. This is why we find him trying to escape from evolutionary time and to seek refuge in a sense of purpose outside of time. The doom hanging over our world, he argues, may be nothing more than an illusion due to the fact that our minds are still imperfect and incapable of apprehending the truth without distorting it (see *Scepticism of the Instrument*, 1903). Although we cannot prove it, things must be different from what they seem. In spite of all its claims to scientific objectivity, prophecy leads to faith:

> Our lives and powers are limited; our scope in space and time is limited; and it is not unreasonable that for fundamental beliefs we must go outside the sphere of reason and set our feet upon Faith. Implicit in all such speculations as this is a very definite and quite arbitrary belief, and that belief is that neither humanity, nor, in truth, any individual human being, is living its life in vain. (13)

Change being an indisputable fact, Wells's assumption of a common purpose we must all serve in order to wrench change from blind nature and to channel it for the good of the species, is the means of asserting the ultimate worth of each human life. The twin threats of unchecked natural evolution and of entropy are thus negated by an act of faith. Prophecy becomes the exorcism of science:

> Worlds may freeze and suns may perish, but I believe that there stirs something within us now that can never die again. (14)

If we move a step further, we may say that this service paid to a collective purpose is the lay equivalent of saving one's soul ("I sought salvation" George Ponderevo says in *Tono-Bungay* (15)) and the conclusions of science regarding the evolution of our world are akin to the biblical malediction. Thus, through prophecy, Wells was in fact attempting to impose upon the world at large a fictional pattern that underlies many Victorian novels. In *First and Last Things* he made a very revealing statement:

> I draw my beliefs exactly as an artist draws lines to make a picture, to express my impression of the world and my purpose. (16)

Strangely enough, he was trying to change the world *not* to improve social conditions or to advocate a better political system, but to turn it into a meaningful picture. What he did not recognize and never accepted was the idea that the world of art and literature is autonomous and that beliefs do not exist independently from the language that conveys them. The span of his endeavour is breathtaking but could it really lead to any significant change in actual life?

We are now back at the question I asked at the beginning: How can one account for such a remarkable shift from fiction to non-fiction, from writing to thinking? Any answer must remain hypothetical but, beyond Wells's desire for public recognition and his personal ambition, there were probably other reasons inherent in his attitude towards literature. To him a novel – whether written in the third or in the first person – portrayed the events in a character's life over a certain number of years, a character was always defined by its relationship with other characters or with society at large. Now, this was a narrative pattern inherited from the nineteenth century novel, one in which conflicts were eventually resolved, or led to a certain reconciliation between nature and the world of man, or, at least, suggested that such a reconciliation was desirable. This was a type of nevel that emphasized fixity and harmony as a very positive element. But, in Wells's eye, the universe was characterized by constant motion: change had to be controlled but could never be eradicated. His vision constantly tended towards the breaking down of barriers, the questioning of accepted norms and ideas, the opening up of new vistas. Surprisingly enough, there was only one thing he deliberately refused to question: fictional technique. He never seems to have realized that a new cosmology – that was what his conception of man's place in the universe amounted to – required a new type of novel. He did conceive the idea that what is true in the absolute may well be different from what is true for man, and this was a remarkably brilliant insight, but he never questioned the reliability of what his narrators said. In other words, he never realized the fact that relativity may well extend to the narrator and that the act of seeing is as meaningful as the thing seen. One may wonder whether there was in him a certain fear of the act of writing, a genuine diffidence in the fact of the novelist's responsibility. He was familiar with James and Conrad; he appreciated their work and knew he could never produce the same type of writing. He may have felt that, in a world in which everything was unsettled and where the future loomed as a frightening void, the only fixed and reliable point was himself. To undermine the relia-

bility of the narrator, to move towards a conception of fiction as a universe governed by its own laws, would have been tantamount to destroying the last bulwarks still resisting the onslaught of chaos. Things just had to be what they seemed to be, and fiction had to show what they were like. Change was inevitable everywhere except in fiction: he did foresee a change in the social function of the novel, but not in its form. Later on, he even suggested that nobody would read fiction if there was good reliable biography at hand. The contempt which the inhabitants of his Modern Utopia display towards actors and all sorts of players is also highly characteristic of Wells's distrust of of illusion. He, who possessed one of the most remarkable imaginations of all times, was apparently very wary of the uses of this imagination.

By gradually shifting the emphasis from language to ideas, from the magic of words to the so-called reality of social life, he tried to resist the temptation of art and to anchor his work in solid reality. But, in fact, he was trying to turn the world into a huge fiction in which life would replace the illustion of life and order would result not from the selection and organisation of fictional elements but from the subservience of all living beings to the service of a grand and unknown design. I am not sure that the 'Mind of the Race', the 'Open Conspiracy' or the 'New World Order' were basically more than a directing principle in Wells's life. That they inspired a number of contemporary thinkers and writers is proof of the fact that Wells's desires were representative of widespread longings in his generation, and that his generosity and taste for life were truly exceptional, but they can hardly be considered as the result of a systematic examination of social and political conditions.

When he decided to become a thinker and a prophet Wells probably followed the only path left open to him, short of questioning his own self and exploring the inner world of his perception. He may have deliberately sacrificed his talent as a novelist, but he had apparently reached a point when nothing short of a reconsideration of fiction as a literary genre could have led him out of this impasse. But to do so would have meant opening 'The Door in the Wall' or trying on 'The Beautiful Suit' and he was probably far too fond of life, at an elemental sensuous level, to take such a risk.

However, it would be pointless to regret that all his promise as a novelist was not entirely fulfilled. The shift that took place at the turn of the century marked the emergence of the prophet at the expense of the writer, but I wonder whether the reason why his prophecies remain so readable today may not be that they are so profoundly fictions.

NOTES

1. David Lodge. "Assessing H.G. Wells". *Encounter*, XXVIII, 1 (Jan.1967) 54.
2. *Tono-Bungay*. London, Pan Books reprint, 1964, p. 15.
3. "The Lost Quest". *Saturday Review*, LXXXIII (6.03.1897) 250.
4. *The Sleeper Awakes*. London, Collins reprint, 1954, p. 189.
5. Quoted by P. Parrinder in *H.G. Wells, The Critical Heritage*, London, 1972, p. 49.
6. *The Discovery of the Future*. London, 1902, pp. 66-67.
7. Wells called it "perhaps my most ambitious novel". *Experiment in Autobiography*. London, 1934, p. 53.
8. *Tono-Bungay*, p. 237.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 91.
10. *Anticipations*, London, 1901, p. 1.
11. *The Discovery of the Future*. Pp. 36-37.
12. *First and Last Things*. 1st ed., London, 1908, p. 99.
13. *The Discovery of the Future*. Pp. 83-84.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 88.
15. *Tono-Bungay*, p. 173.
16. *First and Last Things*, 1st ed., p. 39.

Wanted: Information on

THE WAR OF THE WORLDS

In 1977, at the English Seminar of Tübingen University, I started a long-term research project on *The War of the Worlds* and its reception since 1897. I have collected as many different editions of the novel as possible as well as all the adaptations in all the different media I could get hold of. I have collected files of (international) reviews, articles, any material on this work (in all media) plus many books, tapes, cassettes, records, videotapes. But I am still far from having all important material. Now, I wonder if I may turn to fellow-members of the H. G. Wells Society for help and advice.

Major aims of the project are: the *documentation, analysis, comparison* and *interpretation* of all versions of *The War of the Worlds* in all media – ranging from the serialization in *Pearson's Magazine* (1897) up to the pop music version on record (1978). The first step of my work is to collect all (international) editions and all adaptations in all media, and to make them accessible for analysis and comparison by producing sound and shooting transcripts, plus synopses. Can anyone, then, please inform me:

1. *Do you know of (or possess) any edition or adaptation (in any medium) of THE WAR OF THE WORLDS that I might have missed?* In particular there seem to be some parodies of the novel which I have not yet been able to trace. There are supposed to be two South American radio play versions which I have not got hold of yet. There was an indication in one of the reviews that a film version of the novel had been produced in London some time in the 30s. And so on.