

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 David Y. Hughes had completed an unpublished PhD thesis on *The War of the Worlds*, while Harris Wilson had published a complete novel by Wells, *The Wealth of Mr Waddy*, found among the rejected drafts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

writer himself. Thanks to its author's critical sagacity and meticulous detective work, *H.G. Wells à l'oeuvre* triumphantly succeeds in these aims. It is true that the picture of the young Wells that emerges is, in its broad outlines, not unfamiliar. Dr Loing's perception of his subject is founded (as he very fully acknowledges) on the general trend of Wells scholarship in the past thirty years. Following Bernard Bergonzi, Gordon N. Ray and their many successors, he sees the writing of *The Time Machine*, *The Island of Doctor Moreau* and *Love and Mr Lewisham* as exemplifying an arduous process of literary apprenticeship. Wells in the 1890s strove to master the craft of authorship with several, potentially contradictory, objectives in mind. He was determined to achieve literary respect, commercial popularity and intellectual eminence. At the same time, he was struggling to express the welter of ideas that his imagination threw out — and to do so in the very short time which, he believed, he had at his disposal. In the chronology of Wells's early career — which Dr Loing has studied more systematically than anyone before him — it can be seen that the years 1894-6 were a time of extraordinary productivity. In 1897 Wells began to falter, and in the late summer of the following year he had a recurrence of the near-fatal illness which had stricken him several years earlier. (He recovered his momentum, to some extent, in 1899.) After the marvellous achievement of his early scientific romances, he laboured hard in the years 1897-9 to complete two rather unsatisfactory books, *When the Sleeper Wakes* and *Love and Mr Lewisham*. Perhaps he was not the first writer to discover that, the more anxiously conscious he was of the effect he wished to produce, the harder it was to attain it.

Thanks to his reconstruction of their process of composition, Dr Loing is able to study his three selected novels in more detail than any previous critic has done. I believe that even the most devoted student of Wells will emerge from *H.G. Wells à l'oeuvre* feeling he or she knows *The Time Machine*, *Dr Moreau* and *Mr Lewisham* better than before. In responding to such a devoted and painstaking treatment, it is almost a pleasure to come across the occasional point, relevant to the matters he chooses to discuss, that Dr Loing has overlooked; but there are not many of these. Needless to say, they are more than compensated for by the things which Dr Loing has discovered and the rest of us have overlooked. Among the latter, pride of place should go to an unsigned and hitherto unidentified short story, 'How Gabriel became Thompson,' published in *Truth* (26 July 1894) and clearly anticipating certain episodes in *Love and Mr Lewisham*. Its title was included in a list of Wells's short stories found by Dr Loing on one of the manuscript sheets of *The Time Machine*.

Since the detailed study of a writer's early drafts is sometimes viewed with mistrust, it is worth saying that, far from "murdering to dissect," this book enhances and increases one's sense of the imaginative stature and sheer poetry of the early Wells. One is grateful, for example, to Dr Loing for showing the development of Wells's narrative gifts and bringing to light echoes of Dante and Tennyson in *The Time Machine*; for unravelling the generic mixture of philosophical allegory and realistic adventure-story in *The Island of Doctor Moreau*; and for his close analysis of the varying strands of humour, sentiment and realistic self-analysis in *Love and Mr Lewisham*. In the case of the two latter novels,

Dr Loing's focus on the contrasting dramatic and thematic significances of the 'explanation scenes' given to Moreau and Chaffery serves to illuminate two very different examples of fictional structure. These particular discussions often lead to arresting comments of a more general sort; for example, Mr Lewisham's "schizoid personality" is associated with Wells's own ambiguous self-description in later years as a "Citizen of the Future" — someone, that is, not really at home in present-day reality. As an extra bonus, *H.G. Wells à l'oeuvre* concludes with facsimiles of more than 50 manuscript sheets, and with an appendix reprinting 100 items, many of them published here for the first time, from Wells's correspondence during the years 1887-1900.

Besides its intrinsic value as a work of scholarship, *H.G. Wells à l'oeuvre* is a timely book which points out several directions for the future. The Wells whom it portrays is very definitely 'under revision'. We need more editions of his letters, and further studies of his literary manuscripts (Dr Loing himself singles out the MS materials relating to *The First Men in the Moon* and *Tono-Bungay* as being the most complex and potentially important). But there is another task which urgently needs doing. As long ago as 1947, George Orwell pointed out that the Penguin text of *The Island of Doctor Moreau* contained large numbers of misprints, including at least one which had persisted through every edition of the novel since 1896. Orwell also said that in 1941 he had mentioned this "particularly stupid misprint" to Wells himself. To the younger writer's astonishment, Wells replied both that he knew that it was there and that he could not be bothered to do anything about it. (Orwell did not identify the misprint, and so I cannot say whether it has subsequently been corrected.) Have not Wells scholars, by and large, done little or nothing to alter this state of affairs? It is apparent from Dr Loing's work that — whatever he may have felt in 1941 — Wells had earlier taken meticulous care over his earlier books, and that as late as the 1920s he was still interested enough to revise the text of *Dr Moreau*. The three-page introduction by Prendick's nephew Charles Edward, tentatively identifying Dr Moreau's island with Noble's Isle, was suppressed in the Atlantic Edition of 1924; nevertheless, it reappears in the Penguin edition (and, presumably, all other subsequent editions). The text of the Atlantic Edition was, we are told, fully read and revised by its author. Dr Loing and many other scholars have nominated it as the standard text for those of Wells's novels which it contains. But what acutally is — or what ought to be — its status? No more than 670 sets were printed, and it has never been subsequently reproduced. (Why not?) So far as I know, no scholarly article has yet been devoted to the Atlantic Edition, and there has been no systematic study either of the general state of its texts or of the work that Wells put into it. As this situation indicates, the textual editing of Wells's novels is not even yet in its infancy. The sort of work that is taken for granted with other major modern authors such as Hardy, Yeats, Forster, Lawrence and Joyce has not even yet begun.

It is worth asking why this is so, and why (with some distinguished exceptions) so few Wells scholars have attempted the sort of detailed textual and archival study of which *H.G. Wells à l'oeuvre* is a magnificent example. There are various answers to these questions including commercial and legal ones — and doubtless Wells's sheer fecundity has proved, up to now, an effective deterrent. It could even be said that

such a minutely-focussed approach goes 'against the grain' for Wellsians, who, like their master, have usually preferred to aim for a broad range and an encyclopaedic sweep. The contrast between Dr Loing and his French scholarly predecessors, Edouard Guyot, Georges Connes and the late Jean-Pierre Vernier, is instructive in this regard. Their books were 'outlines' covering, so far as they could, the whole of Wells; Dr Loing, though in every way a worthy successor, restricts himself to 'A Writer's Beginnings.' We should beware of any assumption that the scholar who prefers the microscopic study of textual documents to the wide-angle approach that others have favoured is somehow less 'Wellsian' in his fundamental outlook. Since completing his doctorate, Dr Loing has worked for several years as a high official in the service of the French socialist government. He is thus not only a *savant* but a potential Open Conspirator — a combination of which Wells himself would have heartily approved.

Reflections on some Recent Biography

David C. Smith

G. P. Wells ed. *H.G. Wells in Love: Postscript to an Experiment in Autobiography* London (Faber and Faber) 1984, £8.95, 253pps.

Anthony West *H.G. Wells, Aspects of a Life* NY(Random House) 1984, \$22.95, 405pps.; London (Hutchinson) 1984, £12.95, 405pps.; Harmondsworth (Penguin) 1985, £4.95, 383pps.

One of the marks of a great person is the desire of friends and relatives to write biographical accounts after the life. Probably the most extraordinary case of this is F. D. Roosevelt, all of whose children, as well as his wife, and most of his cabinet members, friends and staff wrote biographical pieces about him and them. H.G. Wells is not far behind, especially when one remembers that he lived on long after most of those who could write such pieces. Few memoirs of the time do not have sections on Wells, or anecdotes about him. Both of his natural sons have produced pieces about their father. Frank Wells produced an illustrated biography and G. P. Wells wrote a fair amount about his father in *The Last Books of H.G. Wells*, as well as editing volume three of the *Autobiography*. Anthony West wrote a novel about his mother and father (*Heritage*, New York, 1955), not published in England until after his mother died. It has recently been republished with a new introduction, which offers a damning portrait of his mother. Now we also have his biography of his father. However, this is not the first such effort by West. In January, 1976, as an example, West produced two long articles about his parents in the *Observer*. Altogether, we have a number of accounts of H.G. Wells by his children, as well as his own autobiographical view.

All of these suffer from the general problems of works by children about their parents as well as the distortions of autobiography. The adult is seen through fun-house glass, as it were, occasionally larger, often smaller than life, but always twisted in some way from the actual person. With an individual like H.G. Wells, the twisting is often even more pronounced because nearly everyone who reads or writes about him does so with light refracted from their own prism. Much the same thing is true of Wells's own accounts of his life, both in the original volumes in 1934, and the recent addition, published under the somewhat unfortunate title of *H.G. Wells in Love*.

Interestingly enough, the autobiographical accounts remain the truest picture. When *Experiment in Autobiography* appeared in 1934, it was welcomed as one of the clearest and most open efforts at describing one's life that had yet appeared. Fifty years after the fact, the judgement remains true. H.G. Wells recalled his correspondence, visited his early homes, discussed his early life with those friends and companions still alive (R. A. Gregory, Elizabeth Bruce, A. M. Davies) and produced an honestly written view of those parts of his life (up to about age 45) that he felt he could discuss. The book was then edited, reworked somewhat, and trimmed by Marjorie Craig Wells and Rebecca West while Wells went to Russia. If