

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

one takes this book as presented, along with the autobiographical section of *William Clissold*, it stands as a remarkable effort by one person to understand himself.

Wells did not stop with this book, however. He continued to write more on his life, reflecting on those aspects which he had not been free to write before, as well as producing a number of shorter published essays in the press. The editor tells us that volume three of the *Autobiography* was essentially complete by 1942, although he may have worked on it still more before he died. In the new sections, he deals in detail with his life with Amber Reeves, Rebecca West, Elizabeth von Arnim, Dorothy Richardson, Odette Keun and Moura Budberg. He did not discuss his life with Margaret Sanger in either book, nor did he analyze his deep friendships (not of a sexual nature) with many other women during all parts of his life. So, the book we have now is still incomplete. In fact, there is an air of incompleteness that G. P. Wells helps foster by using asterisks in several places to substitute for names, as well as implying that other portions may still be unpublished.

As one reads the book, however, one is struck again with the honesty of H.G. Wells. I have recently completed a long study of him and his world, and I think he is remarkably honest in this work about his sexual drives, and his relationship with women. In fact, it seems to me that he comes closer than any other writer to analysis of his drives, and he is as honest as it is possible to be about the women in his life. One wishes for more about the women who are unmentioned; one wishes that he had spent more time on the relationship with Dorothy Richardson (because for her the relationship was the centre point of her life) and perhaps slightly more detail on the relationships with his children would have been good, but H.G. Wells was very forthcoming and open in his writing. We owe him a good deal for insights in the area of male/female relations, and not only for *Ann Veronica*, *Love and Mr Lewisham* and *Marriage*, but also for *Secret Places of the Heart*, *A Propos of Dolores* and the three volumes of the *Autobiography*. Those persons who would know H.G. Wells should read all these books carefully as well as his very moving introduction to *The Book of Catherine Wells*.

Careful readers of Wells's work will recognize portions of *The Anatomy of Frustration* in this new volume, especially in his invocation of the Lover-Shadow idea from Jung to analyze his dream life of love. Wells was more influenced by Jung than by Freud, although his early reading of Morgan was also important. The titillating story he tells of his visit to the White House and its aftermath had served him as a story at several dinner tables since early in the 1930s, and has been mentioned in several diary entries from that period. What Volume three is then is a look backward at those relationships which had not been told in the early volumes. The scientist in H.G. Wells was simply reporting his observations. From these works one can deduce that he had four loves of great consequence to him — Isabel, Amy Catherine, Amber and Moura. All four returned the love, although Moura, for reasons of her own early life, did not return it with the intensity or singlemindedness that Wells wished. For him, that aspect of his life was unfulfilled. No biography of Moura exists, except a TV film production from 1976. In it, a confidante, Lovat Dickson, said that she could not return his love because she was still very much in love with her husband, Budberg. If so, her own lover-shadow may

have intervened to frustrate H.G. Wells. This aspect alone in the new volume provides an even deeper glimpse into H.G. Wells, the man.

All Wellsians will be glad that the book is now published. All Wellsians will also hope that it, as well as the other correspondence and materials still in the hands of the Wells family, will be deposited soon in either the Wells archive in Champaign or in Bromley. For as yet we can not see him completely, although this book helps us immensely.

Whether one can say as much for Anthony West's efforts is very problematical. Anthony West has had an apparent need to exorcise his famous parents. To that end he has produced novels, reissued them, now writes a biography of his father, and has offered other bits and pieces over time. All these are varnished and smoothed with the novelist's eye, and must, therefore, without proper documentation, be viewed as interesting documents, but briefs for the plaintiff. Some of the information West relies upon is simply false. He is wrong on the subject of George Gissing and H.G. Wells, points well supported by Gissing authorities, and by the evidence in the Wells correspondence itself. He is wrong on Dorothy Richardson, so much so as to make one wonder if he has actually read any of *Pilgrimage*. And, he has changed his mind on his parents. From time to time he has put forward a view of his father as essentially uncaring (but in the fiction he conflates dates and times so much that that book is untrustworthy.) Later he attacked his mother, and has increased the velocity of the attack, culminating in this last book. She did not respond much to these attacks, at least in public, other than to prevent *Heritage* from English publication until after her death. However, she may still have the last laugh as her papers at Yale are closed to investigation until her death, her husband's death and her son's death. Although we have one very good view of that life from Gordon Ray, it was one which bears the marks of her supervision, and more must lie in the documents, and some of those at least will concern Anthony West. We can only await what they will reveal.

I have never read a book on H.G. Wells from which I did not learn. However, those persons who read Anthony West's versions ought to read widely in the *Autobiographical* literature, as well as looking at *The Research Magnificent*, *Marriage* and *Secret Places of the Heart*. One can understand dislike of one's parents, but it is unusual to find that dislike paraded in so many guises.

Nineteen eighty-four was a banner year for Wells's books. Nineteen eighty-six promises to be as good with the Wells conference scheduled for July, along with a number of new and promised books. To whet one's appetite then, it is good to be able to read *H.G. Wells in Love*, reread the first two volumes of the *Autobiography* now republished in a new format, and to ponder Anthony West's version of reality. We all gain by the act.