

- Wells's relationship with Zangwill and Zionism at this time.
14. Jacob Katz, *From Prejudice to Destruction: Antisemitism, 1700-1933* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1980), p.203 and chapter 16 for a general account of "the Jewish stereotype and assimilation".

Michael Draper Wells Under Revision

Patrick Parrinder and Christopher Rolfe eds. *H.G. Wells Under Revision: Proceedings of the International H.G.Wells Symposium, London, July 1986* (Selinsgrove: Susquehanna University Press, 1990; London & Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1990). £23.50

"Of the fifty or so academic conferences I have attended in my life, it was unquestionably the best." This was the verdict on the 1986 Wells Symposium given by W. Warren Wagar in his report for *The Bulletin of the Science Fiction Writers of America* (later published in an abridged form in the *Wellsian*). During the four days of the Symposium nearly a hundred participants had come together at Imperial College for a wide-ranging series of lectures and discussions. Additional events on offer included a screening of the Wells movie *Things to Come* at the National Film Theatre, a dinner at the House of Lords, and a coach outing to Uppark in Sussex where for thirteen years Wells's mother was employed as housekeeper.

By the end of the Symposium many of the other participants seemed to have come to the same view as Professor Wagar. Some of them, having attended many conferences where texts were inspected and analysed like exhibits in an old-fashioned museum, were surprised to encounter texts which so vigorously refused to stay in the glass cases, texts which preferred, like Graham in *The Sleeper Awakes*, to step out of the frame and insist, in a highly bolshy and eccentric manner, on their contemporary relevance. For those of us who had the good fortune to be at the Symposium, and to take part in the exhilarating discussions arising from it, the 'book of the

proceedings' has been eagerly awaited.

"Inevitably," the Introduction cautions us, "not all the papers that were read during four crowded days at Imperial College could be included here." Lost too is the buzzing, good-humoured atmosphere of the event. But what remains is impressive. In 'Part I: Artist or Prophet?' Brian Aldiss and Warren Wagar reassess Wells the storyteller and Wells the utopian thinker, revising their earlier views but still arguing for the primacy of one over the other. Kirpal Singh attempts a synthesis by taking an "Asian" view of Wells - as a Western guru, equal parts artist and teacher. In 'Part 2: Wells and the Novel,' John Hammond refutes the notion that Wells was a conventional Realist, Christie Davies discusses the humorous treatment of work in the comic novels, Maria Teresa Chialant examines the disease metaphor in *Tono-Bungay* and Bonnie Kime Scott maps the limits of Wells's feminism. 'Part 3: Wells and Science' opens with Leon Stover's magisterial demonstration that Wells confounded natural and human law. John Reed shows in his piece on *Doctor Moreau* that Wells's fictional explorations of the issue could nonetheless be profound. W.M.S. Russell defends Wells the ecologist, Romolo Runcini hails Wells the futurologist. John Huntington begins 'Part 4: Educationalist, Utopian and Visionary' by considering the sexual undercurrents in Wells's fiction, Martha Vogeler investigates Wells's debt to Positivism, Krishan Kumar applauds his 'alternative' approach to sociology, Cliona Murphy considers his depiction of women's education (or, rather, the lack of it) and Kenneth Bailey relates his work to that of C.S. Lewis. In one of the high points of the book, Bob Crossley gives us a glimpse of the letters which ordinary readers wrote to Wells, most movingly those of a Zulu soldier, Aaron Hlope. The last word goes to Julius Kagarlitsky, who was prevented from attending the Symposium by the Soviet government, but who came to Britain nine months later to praise the breadth of Wells's cultural achievement as a model for the kind of intellectual perspective the world needs today.

Some of these essays are essential reading for Wellsians, none are anything less than thought-provoking. Between them, they offer a state of the art account of our present understanding of Wells's achievements. The composite picture which emerges does not, for that very reason, amount to a considered portrait. At times, to use an image which might have appealed to Wells himself, given his admiration for Swift, the contributors seem in the unenviable

position of the Lilliputians trying to survey the "Man Mountain" Gulliver, each puzzling over one small part of a very big organism. To Bonnie Kime Scott "Wells does not strike us as a modernist in philosophy or style"; to John Hammond "his work has more affinity with the modernists than the realists." Leon Stover criticises Wells for overlooking "Aristotle's truth that man is...a political animal"; Krishan Kumar praises him for the "Aristotelian" critical sense he brings to social analysis. This is not, I hasten to add, sloppy thinking by the contributors, simply contradictions within Wells's work which the symposium approach highlights but cannot resolve.

The final appeal of the book, then - rather like that of Wells's own work - is that it challenges readers to make their own connections and reach their own conclusions. The order in which the editors have assembled the essays is ideal for a first reading, but the real fun comes when you go on to shuffle and redeal the deck for yourself. The feminist critiques of Wells can be placed beside John Huntington's account of how masculine resentment of the feminine becomes displaced in *The War of the Worlds*. Leon Stover's suggestion that Wells's utopianism lacks the "normative wisdom of the ages" pairs interestingly with Kirpal Singh's contention that Wells's obsession with the future cut him off from a "central religious tradition." I could give more examples but, since this is a book which everyone seriously interested in Wells will want to get their hands on, I won't spoil the enjoyment you'll have exploring the topics for yourself. If, to quote the Introduction again, "Wells was inclined to measure the human race's ability to survive and to build a better future in terms of its capacity to hold successful symposia," there may, on the evidence here, be hope for us yet.