

Michael Draper

Opinion: When the Historian Awakes

While Wells's *Outline of History* has now been superseded as the standard full-scale account of its subject (notably by J.M. Roberts' *History of the World*, which one trusts makes up in scholarship what it lacks in narrative drive), Wells's companion volume, *A Short History of the World*, remains a unique and uniquely successful venture. As owners of the Wells Society's *Comprehensive Bibliography* will know, the *Short History* originally appeared in 1922, as a contribution to the general shift in international perspective which followed the Great War, and was frequently revised by its author right up till his death in 1946. In passing, there was a special edition for schools, *A Short History of Mankind*, edited in 1925 by E.H. Carter. In 1965 Raymond Postgate and G.P. Wells overhauled text and maps alike and added five extra chapters to continue the story as far as the Congo War and the Cuba Crisis. As of June 1989, this is still the version available in paperback. There is a more recent edition, however, although most people seem to be unaware of its existence: *An Illustrated Short History of the World*, published by Webb & Bower in association with Michael Joseph in 1987, with an introduction and epilogue by Philip Ziegler.

Ziegler gives an exemplary summary of the book's origin and aims, emphasising that Wells wrote with a sense of mission: "he believed that the principal task of scholarship should be to forward the great march of mankind towards a better future." In other words, Wells did not see the history of mankind as a simple, value-free sequence of events but as a story. (The book "is meant to be read straightforwardly almost as a novel is read," Wells announces in the Preface.) It is the story of the growth of science and of the human race's awareness of itself as a species, the story of how technology has eroded national barriers and made possible the development of a unified, progressive world order, today held back from realisation only by obsolete institutions and reactionary ideologies. Unfortunately, the G.P. Wells/Raymond Postgate revision, in narrating the course of a complex and tragic period with commendable adroitness, loses sight of the story which is the point of the whole enterprise and degenerates at last into a kind of panicky Cold War diary.

Ziegler has more respect for Wells's aims and offers his update on the last

thirty years in a spirit of "cautious optimism ... not wholly at odds with Wells's view of history." This is an improvement, but a number of causes for dissatisfaction remain. Although Ziegler has added a new chapter of his own, he has not been able to revise the rest of the text, where occasional inaccuracies may be found. Is Mozambique a Portuguese possession "to this day"? Isn't it rather misleading to describe the V2 as a kind of "bomb"? Worse, there are now three layers of authorship which conflict in tone and point of view. Chapter 71 is entitled 'The Divided World' and begins by stating that from around 1948 the world was divided into "two hostile camps." The next chapter announces that this division was "never comprehensive and soon proved wholly illusory." Ziegler may be a distinguished historian, but his values are sometimes questionable. He takes a dim view of the Vietnamese and Nicaraguan struggles against US imperialism (no mention of Pol Pot in his account of the conflicts in Indo-China), thinks that the problem of world overpopulation has been greatly exaggerated and seems to believe that "Green Peace" is a general name for the whole ecology movement. Nor is Ziegler a rhetorician of Wells's calibre. His concluding paragraphs are the usual jumble of conditional tenses, upbeat pronouncements and jumpy qualifications that one associates with professional historians when confronted by the prospect of the future. (See Kenneth O. Morgan's inept conclusion to *The Oxford Illustrated History of Britain*, for instance.)

What's so crazy about all this is that Wells was fundamentally right about the course of world history, so that there is actually no need to depart from his original point of view. In the last half-century technology from computers to space vehicles has continued to transform human existence and 'shrink' the world, sovereignty has percolated away from the old-fashioned nation state toward a variety of regional and international agencies, culture has more and more acquired a global dimension, the USA and USSR have become less hostile to each other in order to put their resources to more constructive use (as Wells told Stalin and F.D. Roosevelt they should be doing back in the 1930s), human rights, world hunger, feminism and the proper scientific care of the planet have all been made major political issues by an *avant-garde* of campaigning 'open conspirators.' These developments have been accompanied by collective identity crises, frequently erupting into wars and/or religious revivals. None of this would have come as a surprise to Wells, who wrote about such developments as a matter of course.

So - next time the *Short History of the World* is revised (and let it be soon), I suggest two things be done. Firstly, Wells's own text should be thoroughly checked and, where necessary, revised in the light of present-day knowledge.

Secondly, all the chapters added since his death should be removed and replaced by an account which will take us up to the end of the Second Millennium in a recognisably Wellsian spirit. If the publishers cannot find anyone else to do the job, there are, I must point out, a number of writers and historians in the Wells Society who would be more than willing to lend a hand. Enough said?

Sylvia Hardy

The "Definitive" *Time Machine*

H.G. Wells. *The Definitive Time Machine: A Critical Edition of H.G. Wells's Scientific Romance with Introduction and Notes by Harry M. Geduld*. Bloomington (Indiana UP) 1987. \$27.50 hardcover, \$10.95 paperback.

As David Lake points out in his review of this book for *Science Fiction Studies* (Vol 15, 1988), the most significant aspect of Harry M. Geduld's *The Definitive Time Machine* is, that it is not definitive - there are a number of textual errors. Geduld assumes, apparently unquestioningly, that the Atlantic Edition of *The Time Machine* is the definitive text, whereas in fact, as David Lake makes clear in his 1988 *Wellsian* article, Wells made several substantive corrections in both the later Essex Edition and in the 1933 collection, *The Scientific Romances of H.G. Wells*. Geduld's explanatory notes are also misleading. The most prominent example is his claim in Note 1, p. 91, that in an earlier version of *The Time Machine* the Time Traveller was given the name Bayliss, but this is clearly a confusion. Again it was Professor Lake who demonstrated (in an article in the 1980 *Wellsian*, 'The Drafts of *The Time Machine*') that Bayliss was the name Wells gave to one of the dinner guests, a character first designated as 'the red haired man'; this was in later drafts changed to Bayliss, and in the final version he was re-named Filby.

In other respects, however, Professor Geduld's book does have a great deal to recommend it. The various versions of *The Time Machine* are brought together in one volume, and for the first time the chapter of the 1894 version which Wells omitted from the published text is made available to the general reader. The other appendices (VIII-XII), are less easy to defend - or even account for. They are all of peripheral interest, and the parallels with Beowulf adduced in Appendix XI seem particularly strained. On the plus