

So, were MacDonald's evolved goblins the precursors of the more interesting and sinister Morlocks? If they were, it does not detract from the originality and power of Wells's achievement. MacDonald ingeniously incorporated into his fairy tale a theory that was 'in the air' at the time. Wells went much further in applying the ruthless, amoral principle of Darwinian selection to the human race as a whole.

David C. Smith

A Plea for Assistance

Many of you will remember that, just over two years ago, Pickering and Chatto published four volumes of *The Correspondence of H.G. Wells* under my editorship. During the period of collection of these letters, and well after the physical make up of the work had been developed, it became clear to me that there were other letters written by Wells, some in private hands, and others in obscure archives, which should be part of a collected edition of his correspondence. Archivists and other colleagues came forward with knowledge of still more letters once the four volumes were published.

I have undertaken a very serious search for these missing letters. I have located about 600 more over the last three or four years. I believe now that there are in the world fewer than 40 remaining Wells letters available for publication. Of these, 25 or so are post cards to unknown persons, mainly setting down plans to meet, to have lunch and such like matters. A few others have disappeared since they were first noted, often as long as fifty years ago. There are letters left to copy of which I know the whereabouts and contents well enough to know they are useful additions.

I have edited these letters into a fifth volume, and intend to add the significant ones still uncollected when I am in England in the Autumn. This book is ready to go once copy editing and indexing are finished, a work of but a few days.

Pickering and Chatto have informed me that they have no interest in this fifth volume. In fact they have said that they do not want to look at the manuscript. They do say, however, that they are interested in publishing a related work, also completed,

which will provide an annotated chronological bibliography of all of Wells's writings. When one counts pieces of serial publication as separate items, the bibliography amounts to over 4200 citations. I have told Pickering and Chatto that I hope that they will take both books as part of the whole project.

In several letters and discussions with Pickering and Chatto, I have proposed that they ask the Wells estate to forego some of their royalties from these two volumes, and I have raised the issue of subvention. Both of these methods might cut the cost of the fifth volume. They do not, however, appear to have any interest in alternative forms of funding. They say that their problem is that not enough of the first four volumes have been sold. It is certainly true that there are very few copies in North America, and I am almost weekly besieged to provide Xeroxes, locations of volumes, and other materials as the libraries used do not have the volumes in their holdings. As an American I do not qualify for financial support through conventional British agencies.

The efforts to advertise the first 4 volumes during the pre-publication period was not effectively organised, for whatever reason. You can easily tell that I am in a stage of frustration. So, if Wellsians are willing, it has been suggested that I ask them to write or telephone or fax or email Pickering and Chatto urging them to reconsider their decisions. Their contact details are as follows:

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If anyone has other ideas on how to deal with this problem, please let me know about them. I believe that those persons who have already used the first four volumes will attest both to their usability, and to the wide net used to trawl these letters. Reviews were of a very high quality. If we are to see Wellstan thoughts put before future generations, and further research into his life, work and ideas, it seems necessary to have all five volumes of the correspondence as well as the bibliography available. Those who are so inclined could make an appeal to their local and university libraries to purchase the books. Upon request, I will provide a calendar of the letters in this fifth volume. I hope that it will be possible to discuss this and other ideas at the H.G. Wells Society Weekend Conference this September, which I expect to attend.

I make this request with some humility, thinking that Wells's and my work would stand alone, and without need of help. However, I have been urged by many friends and colleagues to undertake this appeal. It is probably already known that I take no money for these works, having accepted only £2000 pounds from Pickering and Chatto toward my expenses. In addition my university has paid for one airline trip across the Atlantic, and may do so again this autumn. Otherwise I have borne the entire cost for travel, as well as for expenses of copying and postage. Pickering and Chatto did pay for the proof reading and indexing, but that is usual in such contracts. I did and continue to do this because I believe that H.G. Wells was an important figure, whose ideas and words merit preservation.

Book Review: *Time Machine: The Story of H.G. Wells*, by William J. Boerst (Greensboro: Morgan Reynolds Incorporated, 2000). 112 pp. [By Sylvia Hardy]

This little book – the text occupies only 97 pages – really is “the story of H.G. Wells” as its title promises. Its seven chapters deal with Wells's life from his birth and early years in Bromley to his death, and the emphasis throughout is on the events of his life rather than on his writings. Some books are mentioned briefly in the text, generally as a way of indicating changes in his political thinking, but it is clear that Boerst is not particularly interested in Wells's literary achievement. The “Annotated Bibliography”

at the end of the book discusses the political and social ramifications of *A Modern Utopia*, *Ann Veronica* and *The New Machiavelli* in some detail whilst *Kipps*, *The History of Mr Polly* and *Tono-Bungay* are mentioned just once in passing as items in a list of Wells's work of the early 1900s.

There are other aspects of this book too that may irritate devoted Wellstans. The publisher's blurb on the back cover, for instance, is disconcerting in its claim that “With his novels *The Time Machine*, *The Island of Dr Moreau* and *War of the Worlds*, H.G. Wells made science fiction respectable. He was not able to make himself totally respectable, however.” Whatever one thinks about the second sentence, the first is not only untrue in terms of literary history in general but it is also at odds with the clear distinction Wells makes, again and again, between his scientific romances (“that other stuff” as he describes it to Bennett) and the novel.

Nor does William J. Boerst always get the story right. Whilst some errors are clearly the result of carelessness – in Chapter Six, for instance, Gip is referred to as H.G.'s younger son whilst he is identified as the elder in Chapter Four – others are more serious, as in Chapter Two's conflation of Holt Academy, near Wrexham, with Henley House School in Kilburn – we are told that A.A. Milne (son of the headmaster at Henley) was one of Wells's students at Holt. This is a significant mistake because for Wells the two schools exemplified the best and worst in private education at that period: their headmasters are described in his autobiography as “almost at opposite poles of conscience and intelligence”. The author's tendency for speculating about his subject's motives and feelings and then stating these speculations as facts is also irritating – his analysis of the reasons for the failure of Wells's first marriage at the beginning of the third chapter would not be out of place in the agony column of a woman's magazine – and he is far too ready to take everything at face value; Wells may have claimed that *Things to Come* was a commercial success but the box-office receipts show that it wasn't.

But perhaps it is unfair to ask for so much precision in a book which is clearly not intended for an informed or scholarly readership. The extensive critical apparatus – a chronology (called a “Timeline”), a list of Wells's major works, an annotated bibliography of some of Wells's work plus a brief bibliography of secondary texts and an index – suggests that *The Story of H.G. Wells* is aimed at undergraduates and secondary school pupils – or, more accurately, high school students. The book reveals its