

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 Wellsian 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 Wellsians. 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

American origins in a number of ways. The list of authors in this World Writers series has H.G. Wells rubbing shoulders with Henry Wadsworth Longfellow ("America's Beloved Poet") and Nathaniel Hawthorne ("American Storyteller") and the vocabulary of the book makes few concessions to the English reader: the Wellses' crockery shop is on the ground floor of a "row house", the Midhurst chemist becomes a druggist, universities are referred to as schools, and so on. The glossary, which offers dictionary definitions of words such as "abdomen" and "indefatigable" also includes a five-line explanation of the rules of cricket, together with an explanation of what is meant by words like "crockery" and "draper" – and it does come as surprise to read that Easton Glebe is "a London neighbourhood". The American provenance probably accounts too for the fact that the term "Victorian" serves as a self-evident explanation for just about every socio-economic factor in Wells's life, from the class system to marital relations – although, again, given the length of the text, some degree of elision and oversimplification is unavoidable.

Having said all this – after all, I *am* a devoted Wellsian – I don't want to sound anything but positive about *The Story of H.G. Wells*. It has its faults, but nonetheless it tackles a huge subject, an overview of the life and work of a very prolific writer, and in the main it succeeds very well. The text is informative and the documentation adequate but unobtrusive – all quotations are referenced by page in the end-notes. The author has drawn extensively on *Experiment in Autobiography* and the best known biographies, and 61 of the 93 quotations are taken from Wells himself, either from his autobiography or via Geoffrey West, Michael Foot et al. The presentation, too, is admirably suited to the requirements of the book's intended audience: there are nineteen full-page photographs, the style is clear, lively and readable and the early chapters in particular include a great deal of colourful detail. Overall, William J. Boerst makes out an excellent case for the continuing relevance of H.G. Wells and his work, and the book is likely to win him new admirers.

Book Review: *Selected Letters of Rebecca West*, edited by Bonnie Kime Scott (Henry McBride Series in Modernism and Modernity) (New Haven and London: Yale

University Press, 2000). xviii, 497 pp. ISBN 0-300-07904-4. £22.50. [By John S. Partington]

"But H.G. has a new song –

"My father suffered hell from rheumatics

"Till he mastered his pain by repeating mathematics

"Showing science is a benefit to all

"Shoowing science is a benefit to a-a-all."

[Rebecca West to Sylvia Lynd, 28 July 1918]

In editing these *Selected Letters of Rebecca West*, Bonnie Kime Scott deserves the congratulations of Wellsians and non-Wellsians alike. In terms of Rebecca West's relationship with H.G. Wells, the volume is particularly strong and, although not providing much fresh information about that relationship, a new (and I think fairer) balance is struck which suggests the need for a more penetrating look at their affair. Far from being pragmatic in her telling of her relationship with Wells, West is extremely consistent. Reading these letters, it seems clear that Wells and West were at their closest between 1913 and 1917 and that from the latter date West genuinely sought release from the relationship whilst looking for ways of guaranteeing their son, Anthony's, future wellbeing.

In the past, West has suffered a bad press over her relationship with Wells, and this was largely due to the publication of two books: Firstly, back in 1973, Gordon Ray's *H.G. Wells and Rebecca West* revealed Ray as something of a dupe in taking on a project to which West attached so many conditions (limiting his access to her letters and forbidding his contact with Anthony West, for example) while presenting his resulting biography as an objective study of two lovers. West's involvement and censorship threw immediate doubts over the likelihood of such objectivity which have subsequently been proved justified. The second book was Anthony West's biography of his father, *H.G. Wells: Aspects of a Life*, published in 1984 in which Rebecca was demonised as an evil mother who blocked contact between Anthony and Wells and who painted the latter as an uncaring father. In light of the Ray biography, critics have