

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). xlviii, 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

tended to take Anthony West's side in the argument between himself and his mother over Wells's role in their lives, refusing to trust Rebecca's word when she put forward her side of the story. While West's role in the Ray biography can never be forgiven, I think Scott's collection of letters will go a long way towards vindicating West in her role as mother and lover. Indeed, if these letters turn out to be representative of the many others not yet in print, it is likely that Anthony West will be seen as the villain in the battle between mother and son. (Having said that, Anthony West's writings about his parents may ironically prove more beneficial to West/Wells scholarship than I have suggested for, as Rebecca wrote to Beverley Nichols in 1973, Anthony's vitriol persuaded Rebecca to save much of Wells's correspondence from destruction: "I kept all H.G.'s letters, which amounted to 800. I think I would have destroyed them before I died, but when Anthony began to act peculiarly and wrote that awful book [*Heritage*, 1955], I gave them to Yale University, who put them in the Beinecke.")

As well as clearing up some of the issues surrounding West, Wells and Anthony, these letters also reaffirm many of Rebecca's frustrations. For instance, throughout her affair with Wells, and indeed after, Rebecca was insistent that Wells was not taken care of or treated with affection by his wife, Amy Catherine ('Jane') Wells. The following quotations demonstrate this clearly:

"I have stuck to him partly for his own sake – mainly for Anthony's sake – but really quite a lot for his own sake as he has, to an extent nobody quite realises, not a soul on earth who looks after him" [West to S.K. Radcliffe, 21 March 1923].

"He's apparently being very good to Jane, which must be the last tragedy of her poor life, for I'm sure she's been bored to death with him for years" [West to Vyvyan Holland, July 1927].

These sentiments fly in the face of all other evidence of Wells's relationship with Jane, particularly his introduction to *The Book of Catherine Wells* (1927) and his 1934 autobiography. A very interesting letter, written by Rebecca to Jane while the latter was suffering illness, is curious for the fact that it contradicts the belief that Rebecca hated Jane with irreconcilable passion: "I have just heard from H.G. how ill you have

been and wanted to tell you how sorry I am to hear that you have had such a distressing time and how glad I am to hear that you are getting on well" (6 December 1920). However, the context of this letter must be investigated further to see if Wells and West were together at the time of its writing and to understand if this seemingly kind note was actually a bitter tease at the sick wife whose husband was in Rebecca's arms.

What most comes through in the letters to or about Wells is the ambivalent relationship that they both shared. It was love-hate and it produced much happiness and much distress. West sums up their relations perfectly in a letter written to Emanie Arling on 13 August 1946, soon after she heard of H.G.'s death: "Dear H.G., he was a devil, he ruined my life, he starved me, he was an inexhaustible source of love and friendship to me for thirty-four years, we should never have met, I was the one person he cared to see to the end, I feel desolate because he has gone." The feelings expressed in Wells's *H.G. Wells in Love* (1984) show an equal ambivalence.

Throughout this volume, Scott's editorship cannot be faulted. Her annotations, although a bit thin in parts, are helpful and never too extensive. As a collection in itself, the volume stands up very well, though it is to be hoped that its eventual role will be as an introduction to a more extensive publication of West's letters as well as (and perhaps more importantly to Wells scholars) the publication of the 800 letters from Wells to West (especially as Scott has only been able to publish 9 of West's letters to H.G. Wells, 1 to G.P. Wells, 1 to Jane Wells, 1 to Marjorie Wells and 6 to Anthony West in this collection). Curiously, in her introduction, Scott states that the publication of Gordon Ray's book has,

had the unfortunate effect of reducing [West's] presence in the forthcoming [sic] four-volume edition of Wells's letters. Its editor, David C. Smith, prints only a very small number of Wells's letters to West. He justifies this near-exclusion by citing the existence of Ray's volume, even though the book really only weaves extracts from the letters into Ray's own narrative on the relationship of West and Wells.

My understanding is, on the contrary, that Smith excluded Wells's letters to West from his 4-volume *Correspondence of H.G. Wells* (1998) because access to West's archives only became generally available after he had signed a contract for his project. Indeed, he was initially to have produced just a 2-volume edition, which was increased to four when the sheer quantity of Wells's letters came to be known. Were he to have included Wells's letters to West, as well as those to Henry James, George Gissing, Arnold Bennett and Olaf Stapledon, he could easily have produced eight to ten volumes of correspondence. Whatever the true situation, however, it is to be hoped that Smith will delve into the archive sometime in the future, in preparation for the publication of his eagerly awaited fifth volume of letters.

Book Review: *Post-traumatic Culture: Injury and Interpretation in the Nineties*, by Kirby Farrell (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998). xviii, 422pp. [By John S. Partington]

As Kirby Farrell tells us in his preface to *Post-traumatic Culture*, "the mood I am describing is post-traumatic – belated, epiphenomenal, the outcome of cumulative stresses. It reflects a disturbance in the ground of collective experience: a shock to people's values, trust, and sense of purpose; an obsessive awareness that nations, leaders, even we ourselves can die." Whereas trauma commonly arises out of one-of or rare incidents, post-traumatic stresses appear to be cultural or societal problems that the individual is unable to counter. Although instances of the latter, such as job insecurity or wars of mass-destruction, are more often characterised as twentieth-century phenomena, Farrell's aim is to re-inform our notions of perceived or actual late-nineteenth century crises with a view to revealing the similarities of reaction to events, even when those events may be of a very different nature.

It will surprise no true Wellsian to discover that H.G. Wells fits into this study in both the 1890s section and the 1990s section, so appealing has Wells's writing been throughout the last hundred-odd years. In discussing *The Time Machine*, Farrell produces interesting contrasts with Wells's later thought. In writing the novella, "Wells creates his future by intensifying the post-traumatic symptoms latent in the

conventional world around him." Although the Time Traveller talks in terms of class-war when discussing the split in the human race by the year 802,701, Farrell prefers to look at the relationship between the Time Traveller and the Eloi and Morlocks for clues of late-Victorian post-traumatic stress. Hence, "The Time Traveller's pity towards the victimized Eloi and his outrage at the predatory Morlocks expresses a parental ambivalence toward the young." In light of Victorian thinking about children in the home, the workplace and the schoolroom, "The Eloi reflect anxieties about the dangers of inculcating too much submissiveness or not enough self-discipline, just as the Morlocks suggest fears of arousing uncontrollable hatred through too much severity." The excessive energy of the young, a prominent issue throughout Wells's writing career, suggests that "The novel imagines a parent figure among pseudochildren who are beyond the parent's control. Authority and nurture are alike in crisis." In the wake of the children's rights movement of the late-nineteenth century, there was much confusion amongst late-Victorians concerning the best way to facilitate the mental and physical growth of the child. Hence, the question for the Time Traveller – if he had saved "Weena from the Morlocks, what would he do with her in 1890s London? Exhibit her until she succumbed like Pocahontas? Given his painfully disproportionate power, how could he erase the suggestion of kidnapping?" – resonated throughout contemporary thinking on the rearing of children. And Wells's way of dealing with this post-traumatic problem? "As Holmes retires into a drugged torpor and Ayesha [in Rider Haggard's *She*] shrivels to dust, so in the end Wells dispatches his Traveller into the oblivion of time." With such an ending, Wells flees the question and, if by so doing his own sense of trauma is relieved, the post-traumatic culture of late-Victorian society is only intensified.

In his Epilogue, Farrell chooses, amongst other films, to look at *Island of Dr Moreau* (1996). In the revolt of the beast-folk against the manipulative Dr Moreau, Farrell sees many parallels with 1990s society. For instance, "Like many fundamentalists today, he [Douglas, the castaway on the island] seems to side with exploited 'bottom dogs,' yet his deepest faith is in the 'natural' status quo – which would preserve a caste system." Although traditional readings of the H.G. Wells novel have identified, in the beast-folk's revolt, a lower-class rejection of bourgeois religious values, Farrell prefers to see in the film a subtle advocacy of corporate oppression. By making Moreau so demonic, the viewer naturally sympathises with his animal victims, as Douglas does in