

BOOKS CONTAINING MATERIAL ON WELLS (since 1970)

- **A Soviet Heretic. Essays by Evgeny Zamiatin.** Edited and translated by Mirra Ginsburg. Chicago & London, The University of Chicago Press, 1970. Contains Zamyatin's essay on "H.G. Wells" (1922), pp. 259-290.
- **William Bellamy. The Novels of Wells, Bennett and Galsworthy, 1890-1910.** London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1971.
- **David Lodge. The Novelist at the Crossroads.** London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1971. Contains a reprint of "Assessing H.G. Wells", originally published in *Encounter*, XXVIII, 1 (Jan 1967) 54-61.
- **Samuel Hynes. Edwardian Occasions.** London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972. Contains a reprint of "H.G. and G.B.S.", originally published in *T.L.S.* (Nov. 1969).
- **Bernard Bergonzi. The Turn of a Century.** London, Macmillan, 1973. Contains reprints of "The Correspondence of Gissing and Wells" (1962) and of the Introduction to the Riverside Edition of *Tono-Bungay* (Houghton Mifflin, 1966.)

THE TIME TRAVELLER: THE LIFE OF H.G. WELLS by Norman and Jeanne MacKenzie

Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1973, 487 pp., 46 illustrations. £5.95

This is the first full-length scholarly biography of Wells to appear since his death, and the first to make extensive use of his unpublished private papers.

Devotees of Wells will find it a highly readable, indeed fascinating, account of his life and background -- the kind of book which can be read not only once but can be returned to again and again. It is in no sense a **critical** biography: there is little attempt to discuss Wells's contribution to English literature or to assess his achievement as a thinker and polemic. It is a straightforward account of his life and times, illuminated throughout by penetrating insight and lively scholarship.

The MacKenzies are particularly skilful in tracing the sociological background to the various phases in Wells's career: his birthplace at Bromley; his student days at the Normal School of Science; his encounter with the Fabian Society; his role in the First World War; and so on. At each stage in his life he is placed in the context of his times against the backcloth of his contemporaries in the world of literature and ideas.

Tono-Bungay (in my view a sadly neglected work) receives a warm tribute from the MacKenzies: "With *Tono-Bungay* Wells reached the peak of his career as a novelist. All the earlier books led up to it and the later ones away from it.....of all his novels, it was the epitome of Wells".

Some readers, perhaps, may prefer more analysis of the **writings** as distinct from the **life** -- but that may be asking for too much. Certainly there is a need for a

concise guide book to all Wells's novels -- including the lesser known ones -- but this was clearly outside the scope of the present work.

The *Time Traveller* needs to be read in conjunction with Geoffrey West's admirable *H.G. Wells: A Sketch for a Portrait*, first published in 1930, and as readable today as ever. West's book has the great merit that Wells the man seems to come to life again in his pages and animate each episode, in a way which is not so true of the MacKenzies biography, excellent though it is. Reading these two books together, then, one arrives at a comprehensive view of Wells and a clearer assessment of his place in the history of the twentieth century. The MacKenzies are to be congratulated on producing a well thought out and carefully researched biography, and for their frankness in describing his complicated emotional life -- a full-scale biography like this one was long overdue.

J.R.H.

Alfred Borrello.
H.G. WELLS AUTHOR IN AGONY.
Southern Illinois University Press,
1972. XVII + 137p., \$5.95.

To sum up in about one hundred and twenty pages the nature of Wells's achievement and to give a balanced critical assessment of it was something of a challenge. Alfred Borrello has risen to it and written a book which is what Wells would probably have called "sound work".

He attempts to place Wells against the background of the XVIIIth century Enlightenment on the one hand, and the modern novel on the other. This enables him to define Wells's position in literature and to point out the reasons why he appeals to modern readers. Wells was not only aware of the dangers inherent in a sudden unforeseen development of science and technology, he also realized that the main problem for modern man was to define his own individuality in a rapidly changing world. Quite rightly Borrello sees in Wells's lifelong quest for "some fit substitute for the God who "was a lie" the causes of his success and the reason for his shortcomings: Wells tried to endow man with a divine character and failed to see that this meant imposing upon him a burden that robbed him of his humanity. In spite of his admiration for the scientific mind, he was essentially guided by emotions and instinctive reactions. This Borrello points out very convincingly:

"Wells's pronouncements of his doubts of the existence of true individuality suggest the despair of the twentieth century which has made its youth restless and which is increasingly the concern of its novelist. What he proclaims is not so much what he has concluded logically, but rather what he has developed emotionally." (p.106).

In the same way, he clearly shows that Wells's apparent artlessness stemmed from his wanting to convey in his fiction the formlessness of life, thus creating an illusion of reality that would strengthen the impact of his moral teaching.

Borrello's chief merit lies in his ability to wield great ideas and to see Wells in the perspective of the twentieth century. His vision of Wells is sympathetic, often provocative, and, on the whole, convincing, although there are times when one has the impression that he has let himself be carried away by his desire to make Wells's work fit into a pattern. For example, discussing the concept of love in Wells's novels, he writes:

"There is the love of mankind displayed in the self-sacrifice of the Time-Traveller, Benham, and others who place the interest of the race before their own" (p.43). This is undoubtedly true of Benham, but can one speak of "self-sacrifice" in the case of the Time Traveller? How could his final departure affect the future of the race? Or again, on p. 65, we find:

"Significantly, in *The War of the Worlds*, an unnamed man, suggesting the typical Wellsian god-man and embodying those elements in which Wells sees the only salvation for the species, devises a plan to take to the sewers in an effort to escape the Martians."

But the context does not support this interpretation: the artilleryman does have splendid plans for the salvation of mankind, but, far from being a god-man, he is made to appear as an inefficient dreamer incapable of carrying out the simplest piece of work.

There are also a number of minor factual mistakes which should be rectified in another edition: Richard Hauer Costa is called Richard **Howard** Costa (p. XVII); Lady Harman's husband is called Lord Harmon (pp. 50-51) Prendick, the narrator in *The Island of Dr Moreau*, is constantly spelt Pendick (pp. 57-58); *The Autocracy of Mr. Parham* becomes *The Autocracy of Mr. Parnham* (p. 100); and finally "mitigate against" is frequently used for "militate against", a misprint that would certainly have delighted Mr. Polly.

However, these are only minor blemishes which do not alter the high quality of this book. I would be tempted to argue that Wells's main weakness lay less in his not realizing that the greatness of man depended as much on his natural shortcomings as on his potentialities, than in his refusing to face the fact that art has a status of its own, independent from external systems of values. But of course, he never thought of himself as an artist and once he decided that fiction was to be subservient to his plans for a New World Order, his position became more and more ambiguous.

Short as it is, Borrello's book is a very interesting piece of criticism and a worthy contribution to the recent renewal of Wellsian studies. It is compulsory reading for all Wells enthusiasts, and, for the reader as yet unacquainted with Wells, a remarkably balanced introduction.

J.P. Vernier

H.G. WELLS : EARLY WRITINGS IN SCIENCE AND SCIENCE FICTION (University of California Press, £8.00)

Two aspects of this book (*H.G. Wells : Early Writings in Science and Science Fiction*, Edited by Robert M. Philmus and David Y. Hughes, University of California Press, 1975, Berkeley) make this collection, with annotations and commentaries, equally entertaining and informative. One aspect shows us the development of H.G. Wells as a highly individualistic human being. The second reveals the workings of his mind as it produces his provocative explorations and beliefs. For an admirer of H.G. Wells, as well as for a serious student of his work, this book is essential for greater understanding. The authors, by their introductory and explanatory notes, have demonstrated their knowledge and appreciation of such early writings. They have avoided pedantry and have displayed their knowledge, appreciation and evaluations clearly and delightfully.

The book's preface states that "the primary purpose" is to "make available in one volume a selection of ... hitherto unreprinted writings of the 1880s and 1890s." The authors say that together these essays, reviews and fiction permit the reader to follow the outline of Wells's intellectual development." The pertinent commentaries very much assist the reader to this end.

The book plainly illustrates Wells's "distinction between two basic 'standpoints' towards phenomena, and especially towards things human," one standpoint being cosmically long-range and the other individualistically close-up. The remarks preceding the five sections reprinting his work "are meant to be suggestive and to guide the reader to perceive the coherence of Wells's thought." Although admittedly not "exhaustive" the remarks are astute and stimulating and certainly do "clarify Wells' vision of 'the poetry of science'." The authors' organization of the material follows a logical pattern and encourages insight and thus understanding about the young Wells.

A Forthcoming Book:

H.G. WELLS AND MODERN SCIENCE FICTION

*Edited by Darko Suvin
Associate Editor, Robert M. Philmus*

This volume brings together essays by some of the foremost experts on H.G. Wells and science fiction. These scholars, representing seven countries and three continents, have in the main been working dependently of one another, but their studies display a collective unity that one would not ordinarily expect in an anthology of this kind.

Such coherence can partly be attributed to the interaction of ideas that occurred during a symposium on Wells held at McGill University in 1970 -- a symposium at which most of the contributions included here were first presented. However, that symposium revealed unanimity more than it created it. From the beginning, there was a consensus about what has become the implicit governing premise of this book: that modern science fiction originates in Wells.

In complementing one another with regard to that premise the contributions follow three basic approaches.

The first concentrates on the character of Wells's science fiction considered both in itself and as a general model for later writings in this genre. Tatyana Chernysheva explores the relation between that fiction and the fairy tale and folktale. David Y. Hughes, J.P. Vernier, and Darko Suvin discuss various aspects of the impact of the theory of evolution and Darwinism generally, and the teachings of Thomas Henry Huxley in particular, on the content and structure of Wells's science fiction of the 1890's. R.D. Mullen then goes on to make a case for Wells's later writings, which he argues, have been undeservedly neglected.