

stance that enabled Wells to transport his readers into the far future.

It may be that the brevity of *The Time Machine* reflects the comparatively restricted speculative horizon of nineteenth-century physics, dominated by the doom-laden science of Thermodynamics. In Baxter's novel, the Traveller is gradually introduced to the headier scientific atmosphere of our own century by Nebogipfel, the intelligent Morlock who becomes his companion on most of his voyages. Thanks to Nebogipfel's instruction, our hero becomes conversant with nuclear physics, quantum theory, cybernetics, Gödel's idea of rotating universes, chaos theory, the "big bang", and the concept of the time loop which enables him to go back to meet his younger self. Since it is the returning Traveller who is the source of the Plattnerite which makes the construction of the first time machine possible, Baxter's sequel also functions as a prequel to *The Time Machine*.

Though there are times when the author's invention seems to flag, in general this is a novel packed with brilliant speculations and considerable suspense. It may be that, unlike his predecessor, Stephen Baxter has little to say to "our present discontents", but the climax of his narrative – in which the Traveller goes forward to the furthest imaginable reach of our future, and then back to the very moment of the birth of the cosmos – is magnificently sustained. Here Baxter shows himself to be a true visionary, though in the tradition of Olaf Stapledon rather than that of Wells. But Wellsians in particular will enjoy both the tactful evocation of the Time Traveller and his era, and the manifold allusions to Wells's novels and stories. One of the great pleasures of *The Time Ships* is that Baxter is such a careful reader of Wells and his works.

Finally, what about poor Weena? Those who turn to fiction for human interest rather than cosmic speculations will wish to know that the Traveller never wholly loses sight of his project of a rescue mission to 802,701. But another remote descendant of humanity, the Morlock Nebogipfel, steals the show from Weena here. Thanks to Stephen Baxter's cunning and imagination, in *The Time Ships* gratitude and a mutual tenderness live one in that most unlikely of human relationships, between man and Morlock.

Patrick Parrinder

Science Fiction and Prophecy

Patrick Parrinder *Shadows of the Future: H.G. Wells, Science Fiction and Prophecy*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1995 170 pp. hb £25.00,

pb £14.99

A new book on Wells by one of our Vice-Presidents is bound to be a welcome event. In this case it is also a slightly surprising one. Much of the material has previously appeared in various journals, but readers who therefore anticipate a "Parrinder's Greatest Hits" package, and so hope to reacquire themselves with such gems as "HGW and Beatrice Webb: Reflections on a Quarrel" or "The Roman Spring of George Gissing and HGW", will have to defer at least some of the expected pleasure. Professor Parrinder has instead picked out several thematically-related pieces and, by drastically revising them and adding a new prefatory essay, converted the collection into a fresh coherent study.

Those of you with a long memory or a copy of the 1981 *Wellsian* may recall a talk for the Society by Professor Parrinder called "*The Time Machine: H.G. Wells's Journey Through Death*," a stimulating discussion of what is meant by prophetic writing, how Wells in particular took on the role of prophet, and the cultural contexts within which he worked. The new book is effectively that piece "writ large". Its stated purpose (unlike most products, it goes on to deliver somewhat more than it promises) is "to show how Wells developed and explored the literary potential of prophecy in new ways."

The first chapter examines the prophetic element in science fiction, the second the development of Wells's unique outlook. The perspective thus acquired is turned in Chapters Three and four on *The Time Machine* and *The Island of Doctor Moreau*, generating a discussion of these remarkable books from which no student of Wells will fail to take fresh insights. Professor Parrinder uses Chapter Five to annex Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* to Wells Studies and makes a thoroughly convincing case that this mighty work is a kind of "missing link" in Wells's development, Gibbon's point of view being shown to inform many of Wells's best writings. Chapter Six refocuses on Wells's more realistic fiction and shows how his prophetic imagination grapples with the inertia of our world with more or less productive results, this discussion shedding new light on the much commented-upon theme of "disentanglement".

Chapter Seven has many helpful things to say about Wells's utopian writings and considers to what degree we should take their ideas as concrete proposals, as mere flights of fancy or something inbetween. The final two chapters examine Wells's legacy, first focusing on the science fiction of Zamyatin (*We*) and Orwell (1984), then taking an overview of how science fiction has developed in the last hundred years, concluding (rather tentatively, given its visionary subject) with some thoughts on how it might change after "the ferment of cosmological thinking at the end of the twentieth century".

With these last chapters, the book attains escape velocity and blasts out of the orbit of the academic, gaining, as it does so, in pace and in narrative linearity. Given that the opening chapters are the most abstract and discursive, I cannot help wondering whether the non-academic reader wouldn't find it easier to begin with Chapter Nine and work backwards to Chapter One. The author portrays himself as a time traveller: "I use *The Time Machine* as my base to explore a literary and cultural landscape in widening circles." Perhaps in the landscape of Wells's imagination, and in the present literary climate where, we are told, readers have a moral obligation to seize control of texts from authors, the reverse journey would be an equally legitimate one.

From whichever side you approach it, Patrick Parrinder's knowledge of Wells's work, and of many related fields of study, surely deserves that overused word "encyclopaedic." His writing is as succinct and precise as ever. This is a book which will, indeed, cast its shadow into the future: I venture to prophesy that students of Wells will be reading it for a long time to come.

Michael Sherborne

Wells as Truth-teller

Michael Foot. H.G.: The History of Mr Wells. London: Doubleday, 1995. pp. 305 £20.00

Michael Foot's biography of H.G. Wells has been eagerly awaited by Wells enthusiasts, and it lives up to expectations. Those of us who attended the 1993 AGM were lucky enough to hear the author explain that he had decided to write the book because of his life-long attachment to Wells's writings and enthusiasm for his ideas,

and also because as he puts it in the Preface: "I had a unique and, I trust, instructive glimpse into the world of H.G. Wells and Rebecca West" (ix).

One of the outstanding features of *The History of Mr Wells* is the lucidity and directness of its style – an aspect of Wells's writings which Michael Foot returns to a number of times, making links with his and HG's passion for Jonathan Swift. Another striking feature is a copious use of direct quotation from Wells's writings. This works well in the opening sections of the book, where passages from *Experiment in Autobiography* and from the early journalism allow Wells to tell his own story, but less well in the chapters which look at him as a novelist. Although Michael Foot gives full credit to HG's originality, to his imaginative verve and literary energy, it could be argued that the quotation of extraordinarily lengthy passages from novels such as *The Passionate Friends* without detailed analysis and exposition does little to justify these claims.

The book argues effectively against the claims advanced in several recent "lives" that H.G. Wells was a racist, and few readers could finish this biography and accept the accusation that he was in any way a misogynist. It seems clear that Wells was a very engaging figure, and there seems no doubt about his attractiveness. But although Foot concedes at the end of the book that Wells's liking for women "did not make him a feminist or even an unqualified champion of women's rights" (306) there is, nevertheless, a tendency throughout the book to downplay anti-feminist attitudes – see the throwaway comment on Mrs (sic) Miniver, for instance (112) – and to ascribe a feminist aspect to Wells's fictional women which is not borne out by their prominence or role in the texts; far from being the "raging advocates of a liberation to match anything elsewhere on the political horizon" (112) that Foot suggests, most are portrayed only in relation to, and generally through the eyes of, the men in their lives. Rebecca West's review of Mary Justin's complaints in *The Passionate Friends* sums up Wells's limitations in this respect brilliantly: "the woman who is acting the principal part in her own ambitious play," she writes, "is unlikely to weep because she is not playing the principal part in some man's no more ambitious play" (Victoria Glendinning, *Rebecca West: A Life*, part 2). Perhaps, too, Michael Foot is too ready to accept Wells's own account of his love life, mistaking candour for authenticity. This is particularly evident in the account of Wells's relationship with Elizabeth von Arnim, an affair which is recounted very differently in her papers

But the majority of this biography is devoted to Wells's public life and his political ideas, and here I found myself accepting its judgements. It could be argued that the