

This implies also a definite change in the language of romance. Words borrowed from a scientific context acquire a new scientific flavour when recurring in a narrative context. Moreover, the whole structure of the fictional work tends to be modified, often duplicating the modalities of the supposedly scientific experiment which forms the thematic core of the story. These references to a definite literary tradition, often located in the field of utopian romance, also show an unprecedented potential for rupture in that they create a sort of *mixed genre*, meant to educate the reader through a highly symbolic and mythopoeic exploration of the scientific concept of evolution.

In his preface to the volume, Parrinder defines Porta as "a true Wellsian scholar" and I couldn't agree more. The meticulous scholarship that makes the book so reliable is combined with a deep insight into Wells's *Weltanschauung*, supported by some effective critical premises which are gradually enlarged through close textual analysis. What all this amounts to is an amazingly rich and certainly original contribution to the critical studies on Wells's fiction.

Nicoletta Vallorani

## Two Cheers for Stoverism

H G Wells. *The Time Machine: An Invention - A Critical Text of the 1895 London First Edition, with an Introduction and Appendices*. Edited by Leon Stover. 258 pp, index. \$45/£40.50. ISBN 0-7864-0124-9

H G Wells. *The Island of Doctor Moreau - A Critical Text of the 1896 London First Edition, with an Introduction and Appendices*. Edited by Leon Stover. 289 pp, index. \$55/£49.50. ISBN 0-7864-0123-0

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Recent criticism of Wells sometimes recalls the 1950s science fiction movie *It Came from Outer Space* in which "It" or "They" kidnapped a number of upstanding citizens and replaced them with lookalikes, rather given away by their impassive facial

expression and monotonous tone of voice. In recent years, we Wellsians too have been the victims of intellects vast, cool and unsympathetic, determined to spirit away H G Wells, the genial author whom we know and love, and replace him, not entirely convincingly, with a sinister, impassive intellectual, relentlessly promoting racism and eugenics.

Of those who have attempted this alarming substitution, Leon Stover is by far the most knowledgeable and the most worthy of our attention; and, unfairly, he is one of the least known to the general public. Where the work of a more widely-syndicated Wells-detractor like Michael Coren is shot through with misinformation and malice, Stover's accusations rest on sound knowledge, an unflagging enthusiasm for Well's writings and a willingness to engage in honest debate. He enjoys nothing more than venturing into the lions' den of the H G Wells Society and spellbinding his audience with the latest prosecution, revealing some apparently inoffensive work of fiction to be a celebration of 'nihilism and unreason', a call to violently overthrow existing society for a totalitarian utopia based on the premise that 'everything human is alien; all that exists deserves to perish'. As he sums up, Stover leans over the podium, drops his voice to a growl and delivers his QED with an infectious relish.

Regular readers will be familiar with Stover's contributions to past issues of the Wellsian, specifically numbers 5, 12 and 15. Some may also have read his two previous books on Wells: *The Shaving of Karl Marx* (a series of imaginary conversations between Wells and Lenin) and *The Prophetic Soul* (a critique/edition of the *Things to Come* film script). Now Wells' most perceptive detractor since Chesterton has begun to produce his own special editions of the major science works, with predictably arresting results. It is unlikely that any lover of these books will entirely accept Stover's 'reading' of them, but equally no one with an interest in Wells will fail to profit from their perusal.

Perhaps the greatest strength of these editions is their editor's sensitivity to the intellectual and cultural debates of the period. For example, Wells' view of evolution is traced back to such sources as Winwood Reade's *Martyrdom of Man*; and his view of vivisection contrasted with that of Wilkie Collins and his now forgotten book *Heart and Science*, an extract from, which is handily attached to the volume. Convinced that Wells is always astute in his choice of topics, but utterly wrong in his conclusions, Stover also supplies a running critique of what he calls "Wellsism". Wells never understood, for instance, that "humans as primates, were from the start no less social animals than the living monkeys and apes". This led him to overstate

our natural individualism and to overestimate the degree of forced civilisation required for a tenable world civilisation. Criticisms such as this seem to me not only illuminating, but entirely invalid.

Stover's strength, however, is also his weakness. Viewing literature wholly as ideological fable, to be readily decoded into statements of its author's convictions, he focuses exclusively on Wells' utopianism, overlooking his subject's counterbalancing scepticism and his disposition, within the earlier fiction particularly, to challenge some of his own favourite ideas. While, therefore, I can agree with much of what Stover has to say about such later works as *Things To Come* or *Russia in the Shadows*, the attempt to portray Wells' early fiction as sinister propaganda seems to me to be misconceived.

Stover is perhaps the only reader to conclude that the mad scientist, Dr Moreau, is not just someone for whom we are meant to feel some reluctant respect, but the out and out hero of the book. Similarly, the narrator of *The Time Machine* becomes a sentimental dupe at whom we are intended to sneer, and the Time Traveller himself, a ruthless superman on the Carlyle model, his relationship with Weena that between a superior being and a dispensable pet animal - this despite the Time Traveller's evident affection for Weena and his clear statement that he "even tried a Carlyle-like scorn of this wretched aristocracy-in-decay. But this attitude of mind was impossible". Stover supplies a footnote of over 400 words glossing the first of these two sentences as though the second did not exist.

Some of us have suggested that the Time Traveller and the narrator of *The Time Machine*, like Moreau and Prendick, and other paired characters in Wells' fiction, represent two aspects of their author, and that Wells' fiction is (among other things) a way of coming to terms with the conflicts they embody. When Stover notices that Wells has more than one view, however, he simply discards one which does not support his thesis. Having announced that Wells did not believe in human rights, he has somehow to account for Wells' passionate advocacy of them, so tells us, "He fooled neither his readers nor himself with the usual compassion babble ... In later life Wells resorted to that very double-talk he despised so much on Soviet propaganda".

At times, indeed, there is a perceptible battle between Wells' concise and entertaining text - an open interplay of events, characters, symbols and narration - and the single minded commentary running beneath it, hammering at the same

points over and over, at times paraphrasing and signposting unnecessarily, at other, overstating the case. It may be, for example, that in *The Time Machine*, Filby is a recollection of Bernard Shaw and that the narrator and Hillyer are the same person, but these can only be tentative hypotheses. Stover has no grounds for asserting they are the truth, let alone that the "shy man with a beard is none other than William Morris". Just occasionally, the annotation is plainly inaccurate. Oscar Wilde did not recommend Wells to Henley on the basis of "A Slip under the Microscope". The reference to a "crossing" in *The Time Machine* has nothing to do with highway robbery, but alludes to street-sweeping (as in Dickens' *Bleak House*). A "bank holiday" is a public holiday, not just one for bank employees. "Wimbledon House" may have been a "famous" architectural landmark in its day, but I grew up near that part of London without ever hearing of it and I doubt whether it still exists.

Stover says his editions are "for classroom use", but their handsomely-produced hard-backed format makes them expensive compared to the Oxford and Everyman editions, and the general reader may find the annotation disproportionate. Dedicated Wellsians, scholars and higher education libraries would seem to be the most appropriate purchasers, for whatever their limitations, these combative editions take Wells seriously in a way which he himself would have approved of and are backed up by formidable scholarship. As always, serious students of Wells would be foolish to ignore 'Stoverism'.

Michael Sherborne

## Wells and Shaw

J. Percy Smith, ed. *Bernard Shaw and H.G. Wells*. Toronto: Toronto UP, 1995  
242 pp, index. £20.80. ISBN 0 9020 3001 7

In the late 1940s, the University of Illinois created a great and remarkable archive through the efforts of Gordon N. Ray, then dean of the Arts College of the University in Urbana. This archive is the H.G. Wells Collection located in the Rare Books Room of the library. The University of Illinois has continued to collect Wells items, as well as adjacent and ancillary materials that fit into his time span. Today there are probably close to 5,000 outgoing letters from Wells, and perhaps 25,000 incoming letters. These numbers include business correspondence, so the total amount of general interest to scholars is perhaps half that number. A good finding guide is available for visitors. No accurate count of the holdings exists, however.