

Ray wished, apparently, to call attention to the new acquisition. Four volumes of Wells correspondence were announced. Within two years, three of them had appeared - the Wells/James correspondence, the Wells/Gissing correspondence and the Wells/Bennett correspondence. These three volumes are of considerable use to scholars. The best edited is the Wells/James number, although even here a few minor items escaped the editors. The other two are useful, but they have lacunæ. These difficulties are being overcome by the magisterial large volume set of correspondence edited by Pierre Coustillas and others. Every significant library should own all these volumes.

The fourth announced volume was never published at Illinois. It is, essentially, through other auspices, the volume under review. Professor J. Percy Smith, Professor of Drama at the University of Guelph has beautifully edited this new volume. It is physically and textually the best of the four. An immense amount of work went into this volume, which is the first of several volumes announced dealing with Shaw and other persons, and other issues. This volume gives us for the first time the complete written correspondence of the two men, including several fugitive items which are only available in part in the Lawrence edition of Shaw correspondence. All scholars will welcome the new book, and find a useful place for it on their library shelves.

The book is very heavily edited, and every literary allusion tracked down and noted. In fact, it is so heavily annotated that the reader is occasionally distracted, especially so as proper names are printed in bold type. This is editing for students, and well done indeed, but perhaps slightly excessive for professional writers.

The book is "Selected Correspondence" and one means of selection is to not include any of the newspaper correspondence of the two men. The book treats the two individuals completely from a literary perspective, which some will find incomplete, as the two were such political correspondents as well. Shaw and Wells debated in the press a number of times - over vivisection, Russia (several times), H.A. Jones, modern science and scientific interpretation among other matters. The letters from these exchanges would have extended our view of both of these individuals, who were important in their own time in so many different ways.

Students will want to study the debates over Russia, in particular, which occurred from 1914 to 1918, and later in the 1930s, in a number of different venues. One letter, in particular, from H.G. Wells in 1914, appeared in the Daily Chronicle and

the North Mail under the title "On Russia, Muddleheadedness and Some Mention of Mr Shaw." Reading these pieces causes this writer to again think through the Shaw/Wells relationship. Percy Smith focuses on their friendship - but it was a friendship similar to that with a hedgehog - better conducted at some distance. These two men did like each other; they also disliked each other, and they were very wary of one another. What might be a good idea, now that we have this lovely volume, is to think about another book in which one might determine whether the proper name is Wellshavian or Shawells?

David Smith

Technology and the World Brain

H.G. Wells. *World Brain*. Introduction by editor Alan Mayne. London: Adamantine Press, 1994. £15

180 pp index. ISBN 0-7749-0114-6

One of H.G. Wells's most fervently held beliefs was that the future of mankind depended on the extent to which men and women throughout the world were not only prepared to understand one another but also able to do so - as he puts it in *The Fate of Homo Sapiens*, man's "social being must be rebuilt" if he is "to take his place in a collective world fellowship." If this sort of fellowship is to be achieved, Wells believed, education and communication must be recognised as essential, and in the 1930s he devoted his energies to promoting the idea of a World Encyclopaedia as a means of disseminating information and, ultimately, creating a shared understanding of the world, and *World Brain* was designed to play a part of this project. In this book, Wells sets out a new concept of an encyclopaedia; the idea of a row of volumes, constantly in need of revision and updating, has been transformed into a vision of a centralised store of information which would provide what he calls "a sort of mental clearing house for the mind" (112).

The new Adamantine edition of *World Brain*, edited by Alan Mayne, reproduces the contents of the original book, with the exception of three of the five brief appendices which wisely have been judged to be ephemeral and uninteresting for the modern reader. Mayne has written a lengthy Critical Introduction - it takes up more than a third of the volume - which aims, he tells us, to show "in what ways the basic ideas of World Brain are relevant today" and also "to indicate how they have become easier to implement because of recent advances in computing, information technology,

education and social networking" (2). The third aim of the Introduction - a highly ambitious one - is to suggest how the ideas of the book can be "adapted and extended" to help resolve contemporary human and world problems (2).

In his foreword to this edition, Patrick Parrinder points out that the "startling new idea" which Wells sets out in *World Brain* can now be seen - in the wake of the computer revolution - to be a real possibility, not just a metaphor, and indeed, Alan Mayne provides a detailed and convincing exposition of the ways in which "all the World Brain's essential information and communication functions could now be implemented by applying contemporary computing and information technology" what is more, he adds, "it will become possible to achieve them even more effectively and widely as further advances occur" (17). But it could be argued that it is equally as important to consider the question of whether Wells's plan for the centralisation and dissemination of knowledge via a World Brain *should* be implemented.

Admittedly, in the Introduction to this new edition, Alan Mayne *does* address some of the problems raised by Wells's ideas. The discussion of Rossman's work in Section 5 raises the issue: "Who will administer the World Brain system? How can this system be prevented from becoming a public or private monopoly, not available to all people?" (62). Mayne also asks us to consider: "What world views should govern or influence the organisation of encyclopedic knowledge bases?" and acknowledges that "some people have expressed concern about subjective issues of power, social control, and politics that could arise from a World Brain" (62). But these issues are embedded in the discussion of a number of others, whilst it could be argued that they constitute most problematic and troubling aspects of the whole concept. In *World Brain* itself, there is, for instance, very little direct discussion of who would be in overall control of the encyclopaedia, nor of who should be trusted to decide on its contents. Specialists and experts will supply material, says Wells, but they are explicitly discounted as controllers because they comprise an "authoritative elite," ill-equipped for effective action (85-86). It is, in fact, as though knowledge itself is in control because, as Wells stresses, "It is *science* and not *men of science* that we want to enlighten and animate our politics and rule the world" (86).

This raises another, equally fundamental, issue. Despite his vagueness on the question of control, Wells clearly believes that a genuinely comprehensive synthesis of knowledge is bound to be acceptable because, he claims, it cannot be other than forward-looking. In *The Work, Wealth and Happiness of Mankind*, for instance, he had asserted that the ideology of the first edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* had been

"conservative and patriotic", but then states categorically that his proposed world encyclopaedia would be different because "It is against nature that a comprehensive survey of reality should be reactionary" (766). Similarly, in *World Brain*, fears about bias and distortion in the World Encyclopaedia are dismissed as groundless because "A World Encyclopaedia will have by its very nature to be what is called liberal. An Encyclopaedia appealing to all mankind can admit no narrowing dogmas without at the same time admitting corrective criticism" (117). But this is to dodge the issue; it sets out an unargued ideal, not a self-evident proposition. Interesting and illuminating as it is, I would have liked the Critical Introduction to the 1990s edition of Wells's polemical text to have looked more critically at these particular claims.

Nonetheless, this new edition of *World Brain* is to be welcomed and applauded. Alan Mayne's enthusiasm and his formidably extensive knowledge of work in this field provides Wellsians and non-Wellsians with the opportunity to explore some of the most seminal aspects of H.G. Wells's thinking at this period, and enables them also to relate these ideas to the contemporary world. The extensive index and comprehensive annotated bibliography will help non-specialist readers to explore further. Wells's discussion of "The Brain Organization of the Modern World" as a form of network not only anticipates such later developments as computer data banks and their accessing systems, it also obliges us to look more closely at the ethical issues of power and individual freedom which are inseparable from such technological advances - in particular, what information should be available and who should be in control of it.

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