

retains a spark of his youthful artistry. Ironical wit and ambiguity shine through as ever, qualities unexpected for a man now given to deadly serious tractates, fiction and non-fiction alike.

A videotape of the 1937 London Films production is available from Vintage Classics (MGM). I advise my fellow Wellsians to view it if they are to see why I so much appreciate the H.G. Wells of the Victorian scientific romances.

Looking back on them in his autobiography of 1934 Wells rightly describes them as ideological fables. But while they are charged with political meaning for the twentieth century, they endure as literary classics for artistic merit.

Besides allowing me a forum, *The Wellsian* has openly discussed the Society's future: literary or activist. The former side is my preference, the only sense in which I am partisan. The series has one sole aim: to place Wells in the history of ideas.

Wells remains the supreme novelist of ideas but, remarkably, without sacrificing characterization. In a book review of 1896 he laid down his own artistic rule: "A man is a specimen of a species of social animal – plus a specimen of some sort of culture, plus a slight personal difference." He surely got this from old Plato who said the same: "Every man is like all other men, like some other men, and like no other man." Wells's genius is to novelize all three levels.

For thirty years I taught the scientific romances of H.G. Wells to a full classroom at the Illinois Institute of Technology. My engineering students asked probing questions about their intellectual density, all helpful to defining the annotated series. Here is living evidence of Wells's continued power to arouse curiosity, the very thing that keeps these novels alive. Readers make classics, not critics.

I must admit, however, that *When the Sleeper Wakes* (vol. 5) was the most difficult to explicate. Small wonder that it does not figure among Wellsian classics like *The War of the Worlds* (vol. 4).

Also quirky is my pushing of *The Sea Lady* (vol. 7) and *Man Who Could Work Miracles* (vol. 8). The former is a fantasy (not one of the romances), the latter a film comedy dating much later. But I believe these two concluding volumes will benefit professional students of Wells in a better understanding of his influential worldview.

The most touchy issue I faced in teaching the course on H.G. Wells bears directly on my history-of-ideas approach. Some students dropped out because, as

Christian fundamentalists, they were deeply offended by unavoidable references to Wells's allegiant Darwinism.

Others complained to the dean that "Stover is preaching socialism," or even that "Stover is a Commie." Some of the faculty were of the same opinion, and a fight was on whether to retain the course or not. Happy to say, the dean of my particular division encouraged yet another course, this one centered on the 1936 film *Things to Come*.

What made this political issue so heated was the left / right thing. My opponents thought me a leftist, which will come as surprise to fellow Wellsians who think me a rightist. From the viewpoint of intellectual history, the question is moot.

Seating of early European parliaments divided left and right of the president. By happenstance, members of the left side were more or less hostile to private property, those on the right defended it by right of contractual law.

When the Lenin-led Russian Revolution happened in 1917, its confiscation by the state of all private property was identified with the Left. Then came the reaction in Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany, now falsely identified with the Right. These two regimes were equally hostile to private property, except for their rather more indirect management of it through étatist controls.

As members of the Society well know, the author we honor deemed himself a socialist. But what scriptural authority did Wells appeal to, Old Testament or New Testament, Saint-Simonian or Marxist? Neither school of socialism is friendly to private property, and neither was Wells.

Dr John Partington, editor of *The Wellsian*, asks that the choice of Saint-Simonism be defended. This is impossible to do. It was enough trouble defending a job under assault at Illinois Tech. My work will have to speak for itself.

Book Review: *Herbert George Wells: Parcours d'une œuvre*, by Joseph Altairac (Amiens: Encrage, 1998). [By Christian Morea]

To the French readers of H.G. Wells, a new book about his life and work comes as a very pleasant surprise; there are not many and none have been aimed at the general

reader since Professor Vernier's *Wells and his Time*. Professor Vernier's book was of course university material, yet it made exciting reading for the lay person.

Joseph Altairac's book is therefore more than welcome. It has a special value of its own, firstly, because the author knows Wells and understands his paramount importance in the field of ideas, as well as in literature, and, secondly, because he has the gift of being thorough without ever being boring. One of the main problems about H.G. is his extraordinary versatility: he was so many things at once. He was the scientific journalist, the novelist (and in that respect the "father" of modern science fiction, as well as the creator of Dickensian characters such as Kipps or the delightful Hoopdriver) and eventually the Prophet, the political writer. Joseph Altairac succeeds in showing the almost inexhaustible creative power of Wells in a little more than a hundred pages. This is an achievement to be praised.

A few pages deal with Wells's life and his literary career, then he proceeds with an introduction to the author of science-fiction romances; he shows him first trying his hand at scientific journalism, thus explaining his intellectual background. Then, he starts studying what he calls "a handful of seminal masterpieces". He points out Wells's originality, drawing comparisons between his novels and the work of some of his predecessors. Wells was a pioneer in the field of SF, making use of scientific speculation to imagine what, according to the knowledge of his time, the future of earth and our own species might be. He describes that future in a realistic way, as if he was writing about our everyday life, thus delivering his first warnings about the catastrophes threatening mankind. I have only one regret to express here: in *The Time Machine*, one of the characters is both moving and important; Weena gives the book a heartbreaking feeling of loss, the loss of innocence and beauty. In that respect, she may be unique among Wells's heroines. They are usually made of sterner stuff. A few words about her would have been welcome, women playing such an important part in Wells's work and his life.

Mr Altairac shares the novelist Gérard Klein's opinion that *The Time Machine* came as a bolt from the blue. It started SF as we now know it. He shows he has carefully read Wells when he makes clear the link between the SF romances and the other novels: his quotation from *The Soul of a Bishop* about the trade-unionist who considers that he and his mates are the Morlocks is an interesting example of the interrelationship between different books. It is not artificial, but very much alive.

Now *The Island of Dr Moreau*. Here too we find the prophetic writer, the social writer, the educationist and the fiction writer harmoniously set together. Vivisection, education (which must be a slow building up of a man's abilities, and not based on some sort of behaviorism) etc; Altairac deals from different viewpoints with all the aspects of one of the most impressive novels, giving his readers a good idea of the virtuosity of the author.

Parcours d'une oeuvre continues with *The War of the Worlds*. Here a small detail stresses the originality of many of Mr Altairac's remarks: the Martians do not use the wheel, a tool the absence of which makes their civilization even stranger to us, so important was its discovery to our culture.

With *The Sleeper Awakes*, we meet a Wells who had decided that unbridled capitalism was certainly not the answer to the problems which progress carried along: the disastrous action profit exerts on nature and the relationship between human beings. A world economy based on profit alone leads to destruction, to a cruel, indifferent world. Politics, sociology, the possible evolution of mankind under certain circumstances are dealt with, and the novel makes fascinating reading in our days of the global economy. In Altairac's monograph, we discover the gap between the Wells who imagines a possible future, and Wells the Utopist, drawing the kind of society which seems best to him. In fact, two futures are foreseen: one submitted to fate and uncontrolled evolution, the other shaped by will, intelligence and education. We see that the social writer and the Utopist were present from the very beginning of the literary career of Wells. Of course, we may later on (in *A Modern Utopia*) find that the main problem lies with the identity of those clever people who are supposed to shape that new world. However, it was not the scope of Altairac's work to discuss the nature of the modern Samurai, nor was it to analyse the later novels. Yet I could not agree with him when he writes that those novels would now be read only out of sheer curiosity. Some readers may find the mixture between ideas, dialogues and monologues discouraging, but let us not forget that H.G., as he himself wrote, is an heir to such writers as Sterne or T.L. Peacock (not to mention Swift).

Wells insisted on his strong desire to be a journalist, not an artist, and his literary quarrel with Henry James allowed some critics to make disparaging remarks about his style, what we in France pay homage to under the name "La Forme". It was a serious misunderstanding: Wells, apparently, did not consider it as very important,

but it should not make the reader ignore the literary technique which helped build up a perfect balance between the ideas and the plot within the novels. Wells, the writer, knew what a novel should be. In 1932, for instance, he wrote a superb novel *The Bulpington of Blup* (we find its title, along with its French translation, in the very useful bibliography at the end of the book). In *The Bulpington of Blup*, Wells builds up a striking plot, showing how imagination combined with a lack of serious training and of real education into adulthood, could lead to lies, indeed to a life of lies; here we have a perfect illustration of the "race between education and catastrophe" within a very good story. May I add that *Joan and Peter*, which to Mr Altairac may seem a rather long-winded book, was an inspiration to me as a teacher and that I never found it boring.

In the chapter entitled "Wells and France" the author deals with the attitude of French critics, their mistakes and their achievements. In my view, Mr Altairac's book will be numbered among the achievements and, as a result, many French readers will find their way into Wells's novels and his innumerable essays. It is unfortunate that so many of these are out of print.

Book Review: *The H.G. Wells Society: The First Forty Years 1960-2000: A Short History*, by John Hammond, ([N.P.]: H.G. Wells Society, 2000). 31 pp. [By David C. Smith]

In the H.G. Wells collection at the University of Illinois Rare Books Room, there are a half dozen programmes which were distributed at various social functions which H.G. Wells attended. They usually give a menu, list the speakers and describe the place and the time when the event took place. They are useful insofar as they locate him in time and suggest something of the reception with which he was received.

At least two of these are very valuable. One lists the table seating for an event in the early days of aviation (c. 1910) and among the guests at Wells's table was the famous aeronaut, Moore Brabazon. They remained friends and Brabazon commented on a paper by Wells in *Nature* in 1941 as to the real purpose of science. Another souvenir programme of considerable interest was handed out on 6 November 1938 at Empire Stadium at Earl's Court. This marked a large rally commemorating the 21st

anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution. The group sponsoring the meeting was the Russia Today Society. Wells continued to be a member and the group was useful in bridging relationships between Britain and the USSR in the first half of the war. It may be of some interest to note that this meeting occurred quite soon after Munich and contains a message of good will from Wells to the Soviet people (pp. 7-11).

One wonders who will read the programme of the meeting of the H.G. Wells Society at the Cafe Royal in September 2000. And who among those attending will still be remembered. If the message of H.G. Wells continues to be strong and powerful, many of those at the fortieth anniversary commemorative dinner will be well known and those attending the centenary banquet can wish them well with a toast to "Wells and His Followers".

This useful little pamphlet will help keep these matters alive. Compiled and written by John Hammond, the *non pareil* and founder of the H.G. Wells Society, I found myself reading and remembering – events, places, people. Among those which are especially poignant for me are the afternoons in Peter Hunot's living room in 1976 when I gave my first paper on Wells (on his visit to Australia). Other meetings were the great symposium of 1986; an earlier visit to Uppark when I first realized the significance of those underground passages from Eric Korn's lovely exogesis of physical events in Wells's life; visits to Horsell Common and Red Lion Square, and above all one deep dark night in Blackheath as Bob Watkins read out the chapter on the giant rats from *The Food of the Gods*.

The history provides continuous coverage of various events through the present, with a brief (probably too brief) account of the first H.G. Wells Society, in which Peter Hunot's father was an officer. Future historians will thank Hammond for the list of officers and their terms, an account of the various AGMs, useful summaries of the annual Weekend Conferences, and a listing of the various publications of the Society. Four excellent photographs of what must be hundreds appear in the booklet. Those persons who have photographs, and can identify times, places and people should consider donating their images to the Society's archive.

This is a perfect little history of its type. Large enough to tell the story, or at least its outline, and small enough so that it will not bore the casual reader. As it happened, although I had planned to be at the Cafe Royal, events prevented this from happening. Instead, I was about to go under the knife when my friends and colleagues