

Dear Editor

Although I assumed that reviewer Dr. John S. Partington would not find much to like in *H. G. Wells at the End of His Tether*, I was surprised to discover that he

had completely missed the point of the book. Instead of addressing some of the many anomalies in Wells's life which the book attempts to point out, Partington prefers to pick away at a lack of references, numerous factual errors and the authors lack of familiarity with contemporary critical literature. In fact the issue of references was clarified by the book's editor when he suggested that the author remove about 30 superfluous acknowledgements. In the editor's words, 'you are writing an opinion, not a treatise. You don't have to record a reference to every five or ten word quotation'. However, Partington seems to be more interested in evaluating the book as a student's term paper rather than the observations of a long-term reader who is often puzzled by dozens of contradictions in Wells's thinking and writing.

One of the best examples of Partington's complete misunderstanding of the book's message is contained in his statement 'Feir calls *Nineteen Eighty-Four* substantially closer to the reality of today, but where 'today' is he referring to? Cuba? China? Vietnam? North Korea?' In his list of nations Partington has missed those right under his nose, i.e., the United Kingdom, the United States. The very point being made by the author is that numerical identification of citizens, public video surveillance, hate crimes (read thought crimes), logging of financial transactions, etc., are far closer to Orwell's dystopia than the petty dictatorships of Kim Jong or Fidel Castro.

Paramount among Partington's criticisms is 'the worst aspect of Feir's book is its poor research and consequent abundance of errors ... (there being too many to list exhaustively)'. The author takes the issue of errors seriously and examined some of Partington's criticisms. After noting comments like 'Wells died aged 80' and '*Anticipations* was Wells first work of non-fiction', it became clear that *errors* to Partington were often a matter of slanted opinion. I regret that Wells died a few weeks short of his 80th birthday, but in deference to common usage the single H. G. W. Society Newsletter (Vol. 5, No. 9) uses the term '80th birthday' on at least two occasions. It did not say he died at age 79 and 46 weeks. Further the author assumes that if he had placed the adjective 'substantial' between 'first' and 'work' that Partington may have taken a brighter view of *Anticipations*' chronology, although Bernard Bergonzi's opinions of Wells's first non-fiction work are probably closer to the author's opinion than they are to Partington's. Further pursuit of the 'abundance of errors' suddenly became superfluous.

Partington takes issue with the author's opinion that Wells's political views appealed only to a small group of socialists. In fact the author's use of 'socialist' was intended to be reserved and polite, since in many cases Wells's views were more terrifying than simple socialism. At the *Time Machine* anniversary conference our distinguished H. G. W. Society member, Brian Aldiss, responded verbally to a speaker who implored the audience to move toward a more Wellsian world. Aldiss's standing response was simply (and I

quote with Aldiss's permission) 'We've already tried that. It's called Fascism'. Partington avoids addressing, and perhaps does not even see, some of the more unusual (perhaps *extremist* in the 21st century) aspects of Wells's later writing.

Partington does make a mild concession in his review by saying that chapter 5 'finally sees Feir making a contribution to Wells thought', however this concession is masked by repeated use of terms like 'his ignorance', 'his lack of knowledge', 'potted history', 'poor research', etc., when referring to the author's ideas. Throughout his review Partington has made invalid and ill-considered assumptions (too many to list exhaustively) about the author's intent. He confirms that instead of reviewing an opinion of Wells's writing and political ideas, he is more intent on criticism.

Even Partington's assumptions about Wells's new-found publication and movie popularity are evidence of a closeted view of the publication world. The United Kingdom now constitutes less than one fifth of the English speaking world and in spite of Penguin's major effort, an attempt to find anything but the occasional copy of *The Time Machine* in Chicago, Toronto, Sidney, New York or Los Angeles might demonstrate just how far one of the most prolific writers of the twentieth century has descended.

Respectfully yours,

Gordon D. Feir

Author, *H. G. Wells at the End of His Tether*

10 July 2006.