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H. G. Wells in "Nature," 1893-1946: A Reception Reader
(review)

Genie Babb

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luxury and mercantile economy. The edition would have also profited from contextualizing Veiras in the milieu of contemporary Huguenot utopias, such as Gabriel de Foigny's *La Terre Australe connue*, which, like Veiras, uses the largely unknown and uncharted *Terra Australis Incognita* as an imagined utopian setting that promotes religious tolerance.

The Sevarite society is a "Cartesian utopia" (Saage): order and geometry in the space and architecture of the utopian country reflect and in many ways enforce order and social geometry on a social level. The country is ruled by an enlightened monarch, aided by different levels of councils that guarantee democratic involvement. Nevertheless, there is no private property, and the strictly regulated production of goods and work à la More makes this a seemingly egalitarian state. Religious tolerance and some basic principles of gender equality seem to support this. However, the heliocratic monarchy and the focus on collectivity and collective reason restrict individual liberty in the same vein as More's *Utopia* does.

Limitations aside, *The History of the Sevarambians* is an important and complex text. This edition, which provides two different editions, French and English side by side, is important to current utopian scholarship and offers readers and scholars the opportunity for detailed textual comparison and analysis.

Endnote

1. Johanna Drucker, *The Alphabetic Labyrinth: The Letters in History and Imagination* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1995), 176.

John S. Partington, ed. *H. G. Wells in "Nature," 1893–1946: A Reception Reader*. Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2008. 514 pp. Paperback, £55.70.

Reviewed by Genie Babb, University of Alaska, Anchorage

John S. Partington has done readers and scholars of Wells a great service by collecting his contributions to the eminent journal *Nature* in one volume. Over the past decade, Partington has earned a reputation as an important Wells scholar; in addition to having edited *The Wellsian* from 1999 to

2009, Partington has authored *Building Cosmopolis: The Political Thought of H. G. Wells* (2003) and edited three collections, “*The Wellsian*”: *Selected Essays on H. G. Wells* (2003), *H. G. Wells’s Fin-de-Siècle: Twenty-first Century Reflections on the Early H. G. Wells* (2007), and (with Patrick Parrinder) *The Reception of H. G. Wells in Europe* (2005). To this already prodigious output, he adds this carefully edited volume of writings by Wells and about Wells published in *Nature* spanning Wells’s entire career from his first contribution in 1893 to his obituary in 1946.

Partington provides a cogent and persuasive explanation for the need for this volume. Wells’s association with *Nature* was long and fruitful; Partington calculates that Wells published “twenty-five separate items in the journal, be they reviews, essays or letters to the editor, while his works received fifty-three reviews during the same period” (1). Moreover, notwithstanding the central importance of science in Wells’s oeuvre, Wells’s scientific writing has not been collected on any large scale beyond the pieces published in *H. G. Wells: Early Writings in Science and Science Fiction* edited by Robert Philmus and David Hughes (1975). Partington notes the different aims of the Philmus and Hughes collection and his own. The stated purpose of the former is to allow the reader to trace the development of Wells’s thought in the final two decades of the nineteenth century. In contrast, Partington’s volume covers a much broader span of time, and what strikes the reader is not so much the evolution of Wells’s ideas as “the consistency of Wells’s thought from the 1890s to the end of his life” (2). If Philmus and Hughes demonstrate “how Wells came to terms with the debates around evolution, . . . turning from the notion of biological inheritance in humanity to that of cultural inheritance,” Wells’s writing in *Nature* “reveals the increased urgency with which Wells propagated such cultural inheritance through his promotion of the scientific method in all aspects of life, of education as the key driver of behavioural change and of his encouragement for scientific freedom and the need for independent research, unencumbered by private patronage or state sponsorship” (2). A final reason for collecting Wells’s work in *Nature* is the eminence of the journal itself and the prominent role Richard Gregory, a lifelong friend of Wells’s, played as editor of the journal from 1897 to 1939. Despite its reputation and Wells’s relationship with Gregory, however, little scholarship has been done on the subject. Neither of the major biographies by David Smith and by Norman and Jeanne MacKenzie give more than a brief

mention of *Nature*'s place in Wells's career. A collection of Wells's writings in *Nature* thus provides a springboard for further study of the important connections among Wells, Gregory, and *Nature*.

The book is organized into three sections. The first consists of all of Wells's work that appeared in the journal, which Partington divides into "13 sections where Wells's writings were initiators of an issue" (4). Partington includes all the correspondence that resulted as well, so, for example, section 1.6 contains Wells's essay "The Discovery of the Future," two letters to the editor in reference to it, and Wells's response. Pertinently for readers of *Utopian Studies*, what becomes clear as one reads through these materials is the utopian impulse that pervades Wells's writing throughout, which is particularly pronounced in his writing on education. Wells's utopianism manifests itself in many guises, from satires on contemporary societal ills to prophecies of future dystopian or utopian consequences of humankind's actions, from practical suggestions on the improvement of science education to visionary projects for a World Encyclopedia (which uncannily prefigures the structure of the Wikipedia). *Nature* provided an outlet for these views, and in one of his contributions, Wells commends the journal on its increasing concern with "more" than simply science. "*Nature* from being specialist has become world-conscious," Wells wrote late in 1936, "so that now it is almost haunted week by week by the question: 'What are we to do before it is too late, to make what we know and our way of thinking effective in world affairs?'" ("The Idea of a World Encyclopaedia," 110).

The second section, comprising the reviews and commentaries on Wells's work published in *Nature* from 1893 to 1944, sets the reader on a fascinating journey through reception (from which the book gains its subtitle). As Partington notes in his introduction to this section, reviews appeared in *Nature* of Wells's work from a variety of genres beyond those focused simply on science. The range is staggering: "scientific romances," "speculative works," "utopias (*A Modern Utopia*; *Men Like Gods*; *The Shape of Things to Come*; *Things to Come*)," "fantasy literature," "historical works," "political tracts," "biographical works," an "economics text," and "novels and short stories" (149). What is more, the respectful attitude and careful attention shown Wells throughout demonstrate how influential a figure he was to the scientific community, how "seriously Wells's writings were taken as contributions to a scientific discourse, not simply in terms of the science Wells used in his scientific romances, but

also in his scientific approach to questions of education and politics" (4). Of special note to utopian scholars are the significant number of direct or indirect references to Wells's utopianism. In 1905, a review of *A Modern Utopia* proclaims that Wells "shows a wisdom far superior to that of former Utopists in not seeking to construct out of the imperfect materials . . . a static order which shall be, and if possible remain eternally, perfect. He aims rather at laying down the principles of an order which shall be capable of progressively growing towards perfection" (F. C. S. S., 211–12). In 1944, reviewing '42 to '44: *A Contemporary Memoir Upon Human Behaviour During the Crisis of the World Revolution*, R. Brightman writes of the utopian concerns that fuel "Mr Wells's conviction, so long and consistently and sincerely expounded, that the survival of man and of civilisation depend on our overcoming the stupid and uncritical resistance to thought and inquiry. Knowledge or extinction, he maintains, is the only choice for man" (387).

The third section of the book is a miscellany of all further references relevant to Wells, ending with his obituary. One particularly noteworthy inclusion is *Nature's* coverage of the Scopes trials. In a rather amusing side note, Wells's response to the coverage draws an analogy between the "benighted State of Tennessee" and the British government, both of which, he argues, have conspired to withhold relevant information from the public. In the case of Tennessee, the issue is evolution; in the case of the British government, the issue is birth control. Wells writes: "The Minister of Health in both the previous and the present governments has refused to allow [public health officials] the freedom . . . to give [information about contraceptives] to adults asking for it" (412–13). Wells scolds British scientists for their hypocrisy and concludes that "the *élite* of British science have no case against the State of Tennessee until they have done something to put our own house in order" (413).

The scholarly apparatus provided by Partington is, for the most part, very helpful. His general introduction, as mentioned above, situates the collection well within Wells studies. The secondary introductions that preface sections 1 and 2 are perhaps less helpful, in that they simply summarize the contents with little commentary. Partington has also supplied a list of commonly used abbreviations and an extensive bibliography that includes every work mentioned throughout the collection. In addition, Partington has compiled an appendix titled "Short Biographies" rather than using footnotes

to identify the people referred to by Wells and others. While Partington's identification of some 450 figures (many of whom are quite obscure) reflects a great deal of painstaking research, the reader may not discover it, which would be a shame given its depth and utility. On the other hand, collecting the biographies together in one place allows the reader to use the "Short Biographies" as one of several "valuable resources in their own right," which seems to have been Partington's intention in creating these stand-alone sections (5).

A few minor criticisms are in order, the most serious of which is that this excellent collection lacks an index, which would greatly enhance the usability of the volume. A less serious, but somewhat annoying, flaw regards the extensive range of footnotes. Partington's desire "to provide detailed editorial support" is commendable, but in my judgment, the footnotes are too inclusive (5). Alongside (one might say engulfing) the valuable, substantive footnotes are those that define such words as *universe*, *dictator*, *chariot*, and a whole host of other ordinary terms. I imagine that the readership for this work will be more advanced than to need such terms explained. As it is, the overwhelming number of unnecessary footnotes clutter the pages and hamper readability to some extent. Finally, the material would have benefited from another proofreading or two. While there are not an inordinate number of typographical errors, there are enough to notice, especially of the type that result from too much reliance on electronic spell-checking. I came across at least six instances of the misuse of *there* for *their*. These are minor quibbles, however, when weighed against the tremendous contribution Partington has made to Wells scholarship and hence to scholars across the range of the many disciplines Wells touched. Writing by and about Wells in *Nature* attests to the significance of his thought for the twentieth century and its continuing relevance for the twenty-first century and beyond.

**John Rieder. *Colonialism and the Emergence of Science Fiction*.
Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2008. 183 pp.
Paperback, \$24.95.**

Reviewed by Eóin Flannery, Oxford Brookes University

Writing in *Culture and Imperialism* (1993), Edward Said suggests that the realms of cultural production and imperial exercise were complicit, indeed