BRITISH AND IRISH AUTHORS

Introductory Critical Studies

H. G. WELLS
To Henrietta, William, Clarissa and Leo
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1 The romances of the 1890s: The Time Machine, The Island of Dr Moreau, The War of the Worlds

2 The Edwardian achievement, i: Love and Mr Lewisham, Kipps, The First Men in the Moon, The War in the Air

3 The Edwardian achievement, ii: Tono-Bungay, Ann Veronica, The History of Mr Polly

4 The decade of struggle: Mr Britling Sees it Through, Boon, ‘prig’ novels and discussion novels

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Wells was a novelist, a romancer, a prophet, a polemicist and a mass of contradictions; a writer who heralded the future but clung to fixed attitudes from the past. At the turn of the century he predicted the invention of the tank, yet during the Second World War he was still engaged in an essentially Victorian struggle between religion and science. Having established a reputation as a major writer between 1895 and 1910 he secured for himself a second, far more influential, reputation as an educator in the 1920s and 1930s following the success of The Outline of History. Yet some of his best novels have never been reprinted and discussion of his writings tends to be focused exclusively on his early work. Wells acted in unconscious complicity with his adversaries; he had a theory of fiction which was coherent and responsible, and which underlies his best work, but he failed to defend it as vigorously as he could have done. This book is a work of advocacy; Wells is a great artist, and those of us who enjoy his work need not feel ashamed of the pleasure that we take in reading him. I am grateful to the Warden and Fellows of New College for a period of sabbatical leave during which I wrote this book, to David Lodge and Tom Shippey for reading my typescript and making a number of helpful suggestions, to Mrs Catherine Stoye, Wells’s granddaughter, for checking the Chronology and to Margaret Whitlock and Penny Brown for typing and re-typing the text.
List of abbreviations

In the references the following abbreviations are used:


ABBREVIATIONS

Newell

Philmus

Ray

Ray/West

Reade

Reed

Romances

Views

West

Wilson