

What is the governing idea of the Wellsian structure? It is change. "All human conceptions are *provisional*," Professor Reed summarizes, for man is "an amalgam constantly in a state of mutation" (pp. 100, 8; his emphasis). Wells was not simply a sanguine Victorian; he believed "that *change* was inevitable, not *progress*" (p. 106; his emphasis). Humanity, like the universe as interpreted by that species (not necessarily Nature as it is in itself, of course), he saw as a boundless field of conflicting forces. And what were the subliminal agencies that Wells brought to the light of day so as to understand and harness them and thereby serve himself and others? They were a fear of chaos, of unbridled (sexual) passion, and the desire for a harmonious ordering of private wants and public needs. The "history of the race" (p. 233, e.g.) which the Wells *oeuvre* writes is said to have written, duplicated, by analogy the history of its author, a being of contradictions. Professor Reed eloquently suggests that the expressions of the Wellsian visionary imagination are most appropriately read as *experimental acts* of reconciliation, dramatic enactments of the individual and collective *psychomachia*; and these for the education of their author as well as his public. According to Professor Reed, the very writing of Wells's universal and private history was an effort to envision for humanity a time, place, and state favorable to change, but for the better: the dream was of an ever-renewing order. "Vision precedes act as plan should deed," he concludes from Wells (p. 109).

There is, however, a *décalage* which *The Natural History of H.G. Wells* seems not quite so successfully to bridge. Professor Reed observes in his Preface: "Often Wells's clearest expressions of his opinions and his intentions do not appear in his best novels" (p. x). This Professor Reed sets out plainly to account for the relatively little space he will be giving to *Kipps*, *Tono-Bungay*, and *The History of Mr. Polly*, for example. Ideas will be the thing. And fittingly so, for, as Professor Reed acknowledges at the beginning of his Introduction, "ideas came first" with Wells. But it is also true, he goes on to add, that "Wells discovered very little that was new." Our continued interest in Wells, then, has a cause other than "intellectual": he was "a master of language" (p. 1). So much was he a master, it is subsequently argued, that the repellent attraction of Beauty may be seen as yet another manifestation of contradiction in Wells: he "was severe on aestheticism because he was not immune to its attraction" (p. 193). The Wellsian history is

worth the recollecting and the telling because he was a craftsman of the literary imagination. Professor Reed attempts to reconcile Wells the thinker with Wells the artist by arguing, in the end, that the author of *A Modern Utopia* "had never believed that fiction *should* be separated from its context and shorn of practical purpose" (p. 233; my emphases). Propaganda is not incompatible with art, perhaps, but belief and practice are not the same thing. The idea of a deed is not the deed. Also, history shows that some art with little propaganda value also has little value as art, so that neither the presence nor the absence of propaganda can be said to guarantee literary merit. The question remains: what aesthetic value do the Wellsian fictions have? Even Professor Reed's fine work leaves that question largely unanswered. A persuasive case for Wells as a master of language has yet to be made.

Camille R. La Bossière

SIEGFRIED LENZ

Der Verlust

Hamburg, Hoffman und Campe, 1981. Pp. 223.

This novel offers the reader a tautly-controlled insight into a neurotic male in mid-life crisis. Ulrich Martens suffers a cerebral stroke, partial paralysis of the nerves, and a breakdown of his internal communications centre (if old-fashioned, read: soul). His total loss of speech is reminiscent in its philosophical dimensions of the "Sprachkrise" that was made famous by Hugo von Hofmannsthal in his "Lord Chandos Brief" at the turn of this century. One wonders whether Ulrich, the brilliantly unorthodox tourist guide, a veritable artist of the spoken word, is a mirror for Lenz himself as the artist of the written word. Ulrich shows the less salubrious sides of his home city, Hamburg, and yet ironically brings his tourist audiences to love this city. Lenz delves into the darker aspects of the irrational human soul and yet brings us in the end to respect and love his characters. Ulrich's catastrophe, and perhaps Lenz's nightmare, is to lose not only his medium of communication with others but also "die innere Sprache zur Verständigung mit sich selbst" (p. 90).

What at first seems to be a flaw in Lenz's narrative technique, namely that he writes like an unemotional computer registering details, gradually reveals itself to be a virtue. At first one misses some personal narrative quality such as Heinrich Böll's warm sympathy for his characters or Günter Grass's black humor and eccentric phantasy. But then one realizes that Lenz's artistic aim is to refuse to pre-empt the reader's task by chattily evaluating his characters' strange moral failings. With a painstakingly-paced technique of delayed revelation through flashbacks, Lenz builds up narrative tension around his characters and the insoluble problem that stands like a question mark over their heads. This problem is nothing less than the human reaction to the consciousness of mortality. This consciousness is shown to result in two intense but contradictory needs: to find security and to express one's uniqueness. Lenz shows how these needs can both produce perversions of the soul. Nora's need to find security results in her fear of commitment and true intimacy. She withdraws into narcissistic timidity and frigidity. Ulrich's compulsion to express his uniqueness gives him a life style uneasily based on artificially created tension and temporariness ("Spannung und Vorläufigkeit"). These are his galvanising prods, the means with which he strives to overcome his depressing consciousness of futility. His big flaw is his Mephistophelian irony. He toys with life and is therefore unable to commit himself to a single life aim that would cure his negativity.

This novel, which is ostensibly about failure and defeat, culminates after much suffering in triumph. It is paradoxical that the triumphant communion that unites Ulrich and Nora in the end is in no way dependent on the spoken word. Indeed it has already become clear in the course of *Der Verlust* that spoken words are commonly misused by most of the minor characters not to find truth but to hide from it. Words erect barriers of politeness and lies between people as they mistakenly strive to protect the shameful secrets of their privacy. Their privacy is based on *mauvais foi* with themselves and hence with others. They misuse words to justify themselves and their uneasy conscience, to express resentment against those with whom they claim they would like to be intimate. Lenz shows that the serenity of true communication occurs in subvocal silence. Not of course in the silence of enforced isolation nor in the silence of lasting hatred, for in both isolation and hatred the soul withers and dies from lack of suste-

nance. The soul lives in an intimacy that needs no words to express the commitment of love.

Der Verlust reaches its climax in a nightmare odyssey. Ulrich escapes from the hospital where he is being treated and engages in a compulsive quest to find his way home to Nora. This quest might be seen as a grim parody without humour of Odysseus' ten year voyage back to Penelope. Ulrich does not find the temptations and the high adventure of Odysseus. Nor does he experience Odysseus' indirect dialogue with the gods. Instead he experiences only the hostile rejection of the urban masses who are intent on the self-indulgent oblivion of entertainment. His odyssey ends, not in the arms of his longed-for Penelope, but reviled, exhausted and alone. When he collapses in paralysis, he is mistaken for a plonko deadbeat and robbed. But he cannot be defeated because he has gained a new insight through his suffering into the need for positivity and commitment. His triumph is of the spirit.

Siegfried Lenz, who begins *Der Verlust* with scientific emphasis on medical data and even on physical trivia, works deliberately towards the evocation of a crisis and a salvation that are nothing if not spiritual. This is a novel of spiritual love for the tough of heart.

David Myers

ARTHUR F. KINNEY, ED.
Critical Essays on William Faulkner: The Compson Family
 Boston: G. K. Hall, 1983. Pp. 433.

Kinney notes that in the past few years critical publications on Faulkner have outnumbered those on any other author in English except Shakespeare. What does Kinney's book offer? It includes a brief history of the writing, publication, and reception of *The Sound and the Fury*; some of Faulkner's short stories and prefaces; first reviews; critical articles (most reprinted but some new) on *The Sound and the Fury*, *Abalom*, *Abalom!*, and stories with Compson characters; an index; and a gallery of pho-