

would recommend this book to any reader who wants to find out more about an intriguing episode in Wells's career. The book is worth reading because it does throw new light on the plagiarism case and because it provides a context for understanding what happened – the sections describing the wheeling and dealing within the offices of Macmillan of Canada at that period are fascinating. One can reject McKillop's conclusions about Wells and still applaud his attempt to defend Florence Deeks as he describes her preparing for the trial in the chambers of the Law Society of Upper Canada where 'the rows of imposing portraits of important jurists [...] had been known to intimidate the most self-confident of men'. Florence Deeks was not only standing up for what she saw as right, she was also challenging the patriarchal prejudices which had dismissed her as a ridiculous, ageing spinster.

Book Review: *Odette Keun (1888-1978)*, by Monique Reintjes ([Amsterdam]: Monique Reintjes, 2000). 158 pp. ISBN 90-805483-1-6. f30 / £10 / US \$15. [By John S. Partington]

This first biography of Odette Zoé Keun is of fascination to Wellsians, and not just for the obvious reason that Keun was H.G. Wells's lover for ten years. Monique Reintjes has dug up the intriguing past of Keun, from her time as a novice nun before the Great War to her retirement in Sussex after the Second, and has done us a great service in publishing it herself.

Reintjes divides her study into six chapters, each of which deals with distinct parts of Keun's life. Chapter 1 looks at Keun's period as a novice in orders in France and Italy before 1911; chapter 2 charts her travels in North Africa amongst the tribes of the Algerian desert; chapter 3 looks at Keun's experiences in Georgia during and immediately after the Russian Civil War, as well as giving a glimpse of the British Command's treatment of the mixed population of Constantinople under its control in the early 1920s; chapter 4 narrates the Keun-Wells affair of 1924-33; chapter 5 looks at Keun's break with Wells, their bitter disputes over their shared home in France, and Keun's successful endeavours to reestablish herself as a travel writer by visiting the USA under Roosevelt and Germany under Hitler; and chapter 6 describes Keun's

post-Second-World-War life in Sussex, writing of the rise and fall of her various faiths and retiring in the suburbs of Worthing where she died in 1978.

Reintjes's chapter on Wells is probably of least interest to H.G. Wells Society members, as it is more or less a synthesis of what various writers on the subject have already said (such as the Mackenzies and Anthony West, as well as Wells and Keun themselves). Of more interest are the accounts of Keun's early period as a traveller in the consolidating Soviet state and in the Algerian desert, and her later experiences of travelling in and commenting on F.D. Roosevelt's New Deal projects and American society in general in the 1930s. In these endeavours we see Wellsian influences, but also Keun's own concerns as an anti-colonialist, a socialist anti-Bolshevik and a feminist.

Reintjes argues that Wells was a key influence in converting Keun to socialism. Although few details are given of what Keun actually read by Wells, it is clear that *The Outline of History*, which Keun first encountered as a prisoner on board HMS Ajax in the Bosphorus in June and July 1921, was of great significance. Rejecting her earlier Christianity as an impractical working-system (although remaining deeply spiritual throughout her life), Keun accepted the Wellsian world-revolution and believed Wells and other like-minded intellectuals ought to take a lead in developing a practical model of world-directorates. In 1921 Keun published her fourth book, *Une Femme Moderne*, and the extent of Wells's influence on her is reflected in the fact that she dedicated it to him.

Keun had spent the years before and during the Great War undertaking humanitarian work in the Algerian desert and she was scornful of France's refusal to educate its colonial peoples, describing that empire as "banditry organised by the state". Wells's wartime writings on imperialism, especially in *What is Coming?* and *In the Fourth Year*, where he calls for a pooling of empires under a League of Free Nations and the education of natives for their ultimate self-rule, must have struck a cord with Keun who was concerned about the lack of medical and educational facilities, especially for women, in the areas in which she travelled.

Between 1920 and 1923, Keun visited Georgia, Russia and the Ukraine, investigating the conditions of women and writing articles for the British and French press (much of which was censored) on the transition from Menshevik to Bolshevik rule during the final years of the Civil War. In June 1921 she was arrested as a

Russian spy by the British in Constantinople (the city of her birth) and after weeks on board prison-ships in the Bosphorus she was deported to the Ukraine. Her treatment at the hands of the British authorities in the Porte led her to write to the High Command, as well as to several famous people, including Wells, to complain of her handling and demand compensation. Much of her post did not arrive at its destination, however, and it was only through the pages of her book, *My Adventures in Bolshevik Russia* (1923), that she gained a hearing, reporting Russian conditions under the Bolsheviks and her treatment by the British authorities (the latter leading to a libel suit which cost her publishers, Bodley Head, greatly). Wells reviewed the book favourably in the *Adelphi* of June 1923 and Keun wrote to him to thank him – “a lively correspondence, especially from her side, ensued from it.”

As a result of this correspondence, and following Wells's break with Rebecca West, he and Keun met at the League of Nations in Geneva, and embarked upon a rocky love affair that would last almost ten years. Interestingly, throughout their relationship, Keun corresponded with both Wells's wife, Jane, and his ex-lover West, and they were all apparently on good terms. Indeed, Jane and Keun exchanged gifts and discussed life with Wells in their correspondence. Furthermore, Reintjes's book contains several interesting accounts of Wells's and Keun's lives together from their many guests, including Elizabeth von Arnim (another of Wells's former lovers), Lady Keeble, Arnold Bennett, George Catlin, Sir Winifred and Lady Grenfell, Julian Huxley, William Joynson-Hicks, Sir Alfred Mond, Anthony West, Charles Chaplin, Honoré Goletto, Beatrice Webb and Somerset Maugham. Wells and Keun, whilst living as lovers, also collaborated on work, Keun translating some of Wells's writing and proofreading manuscripts, and Wells using Keun's knowledge of the colonial life of African natives when writing *The Work, Wealth and Happiness of Mankind* (1932), for which Keun received a 12.5% royalty.

In 1933 Wells and Keun split up, and Wells made his home in England with Moura Budberg. Keun returned to travel writing, producing a pamphlet on the rise of the Nazis in Germany (*Darkness from the North* [1935]), which was rejected by all but the most lowly publisher, Dinton, and which prophesied human-rights abuses and a second world war so long as the Nazis were permitted to consolidate power. Keun also spent eighteen months in the USA (1935-37) and praised Roosevelt's efforts at national planning, especially his creation of the Tennessee Valley Authority. She

criticised Roosevelt, and American society generally, however, for his failure to deal with the problems faced by black Americans.

Her work on America lasted until the Second World War, when she moved to England and settled on the south coast. She wrote one last volume dealing with spiritual values (*Soliloquy on Some Matters of Interest* [1960]), but for the most part remained secluded, living on her investments.

In this review I have been unable to discuss the many other works, fictional and non-fictional, which Keun wrote, not to mention her prolific journalistic output. Reintjes lists nineteen books from between 1914 and 1960 in the bibliography, some in French though most in English (and one in Dutch translation). Reintjes's discussion of the subject matter convinces me that Keun's travel writing and her political commentary on areas such as the Soviet Union, tribal North Africa and the USA, deserve serious consideration by historians of these areas. Of specific Wellsian interest, Keun's *My Adventures in Bolshevik Russia* ought to be read alongside Wells's *Russia in the Shadows* (1920), both of which, according to Reintjes, come to similar conclusions about Soviet Russia, and Keun's *A Foreigner Looks at the TVA* (1937) and *I Think Aloud in America* (1939) must surely be interesting reading alongside Wells's *The New America: The New World* (1935), as well as in the general context of research into the New Deal.

We owe Reintjes much praise for producing this short but very interesting biography of a woman whom Wellsians have known so little about apart from her role as Wells's lover. This biography demonstrates that while Wells was very important to Keun's life and thought, there was much more to her than him. It is just a shame that Reintjes was unable to find a publisher to produce this book, and she deserves additional praise for her single-handed efforts to get the book in print. I recommend all Society members interested in Wells's political thought or his relations with his many lovers to buy this book. [Those interested in purchasing a copy of this book should contact Monique M.A. Reintjes, Jozef Israëlskade 62-1, 1073 PX Amsterdam, The Netherlands. Email: <m.reintjes@worldonline.nl>. Tel. / Fax: +31-20-6711770.]