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Confessions of a Skirt-Chasing Feminist: Wells's *Tono-Bungay* and the Idea of a New Woman

The process of defining a critical ideology is often as difficult as separating the aspects of autobiography, idea and outright fiction from a text. It is not surprising, then, to find most critics accepting the words of H.G. Wells's early twentieth-century works as depictions of and calls for the maintenance of the status quo concerning the lives of women. However, to confuse the legend of Wells the womanizer, the polygamist who "was torn . . . between his sexual instincts and his desire to be 'saved' from them" (Mackenzie & Mackenzie 250), with the characters into which he breathed life is as problematic as rejecting Wells's early feminist postulates because they are directly related to the social and economic forces at work in his English society. With this two-fold problem clouding feminist interpretations of perhaps any work by Wells,[1] it is easy to see why his early attempt to set the stage for an introduction of the idea of a New Woman in *Tono-Bungay* is overlooked, even though a handful of critics have focused on less subtle arguments concerning women in the novels that were to follow.[2]

That we find feminist and Marxist methods of interpretation at odds ideologically draws a net, although not an inescapable one, over any discussion of women with respect to class structures. But this assumes that an analysis of either gender or class is myopic or integrally opposing and that any one definition of either feminism or Marxism is all-encompassing. The end to which any interpretation is applied seems primarily directed by the initial ideological agenda toward which a particular critic is striving. As Terry Eagleton defines Marxist criticism:

> Literary works are . . . forms of perception, particular ways of seeing the world; as such they have relation to that dominant . . . "social mentality" or ideology of an age. . . the product of the concrete social relations into which men [and women] enter a particular time and place; it is the way those class-relations are experienced, legitimized and perpetuated. (6)

However, there is a middle ground on which feminist and Marxist critics can work toward a non-polar goal. A combined feminist -Marxist approach has been forwarded by critics such as Michele Barrett in *Women's Oppression Today: Problems in Marxist Feminist Analysis*, Zilah R. Eisenstein in *Capitalist Patriarchy and the Case for Socialist Feminism*, and Lise Vogel in *Marxism and the Oppression of Women: Toward a Unitary Theory* in which the issues of status, freedom and empowerment of women are examined through considerations directly related to class and materialism.[3]

Although Wellsian critic Richard Costa points out the apparent feminism at work in Wells's post-*Tono-Bungay* novels such as *Ann Veronica, The New Machiavelli* and *Marriage*, he does not approach the issue in regard to *Tono-Bungay*, which Wells described as his most ambitious novel (*Experiment in Autobiography* 33) and Bonnie Kime Scott hails as "probably his most successful experimental romance" (109). Costa lumps together all depictions of and concerns relating to women in *Tono-Bungay* as thinly-veiled biographical juxtapositions. And indeed, many of these do seem to parallel Wells's life: his unsuccessful marriage to Isabel Mary Wells, the idea of achieving success – as Wells did – from a lower middle-class background, the search for a successful father-figure – a role left wanting by Joe Wells – and the depiction of a man who loved women yet seemingly could not have the one woman he wanted by his side. However, to confuse Wells's life and the experiences of George Ponderevo is to do a disservice to both.

Although Wells apparently borrowed much from his life in the writing of *Tono-Bungay,* the work is in fact a novel, a fictional account told by a narrator who is not the author. J.R. Hammond points out that several of Wells's works have been misjudged as autobiographies, but "the assumption is particularly misleading in the case of *Tono-Bungay* since from the outset Wells goes to elaborate lengths to draw a distinction between himself in propria persona and the narrator, George Ponderevo" (17). Wells himself made the issue clear when he sent Ford Madox Ford a press cutting from the Glasgow Herald which suggested that the novel was drawn from his life; Wells had scrawled on the review: "we must trace the Fool who started this to his lair and cut his obscene throat" (qtd. in Mackenzie & Mackenzie 243).[4]

So how can we dare assume that the womanizing Wells considered a higher form of women's rights than was fashionable in his England when he wrote *Tono-Bungay* ? If we escape the trap of identifying Ponderevo with Wells, and if we accept a critical interpretation that incorporates both feminist and Marxist strategies when examining the text, the evidence becomes apparent. As we follow the development of George Ponderevo, the subtle pastel drapes of romanticism, stately poses and innocent charm are slowly drawn from the windows overlooking England and we are allowed to look beyond the uneven boundaries in which its women dwell. As young Ponderevo strug-

gles to find the truth, we are shown a world of shifting standards and morality, and discover that illusion has replaced reality. As we laugh at his comic-mythical quest to find himself, we are left shuddering as the women he encounters become all-too-accurate depictions of the suppressed and the oppressed, controlled by an economic structure which purposefully denies them autonomy.

Ponderevo's England is a land strangled within the ever-tightening grip of capitalism as exemplified by the medium of advertising and by class systems, favouring stagnation. The character sums up his observations near the end of the novel as a "story of activity and urgency and sterility. I have called it *Tono-Bungay*, but I had far better called it *Waste*" (311). Ponderevo has made fortunes alongside his uncle and has seen them disappear. He has sought the truth of his soul and of his England, finding only a reflection of the prize he has sought for, now rotten.

Perhaps Ponderevo's discoveries are inevitable as British enlightenment takes its last breaths. David Lodge states:

> The Condition of England in *Tono-Bungay*, might be formulated as follows: Late Victorian and Edwardian England is a country dedicated to aimlessness and waste. The social and political principles of 1688 have not been replaced by any new theories, although society has been economically transformed by the Industrial Revolution. (115)

Ponderevo undertakes his quest in a world that for all intents and purposes has no rules for dealing with the onslaught of new ideas generated by late Victorian British capitalism. As he tries to fashion meaning, it is by standards that do not as yet exist and it opposes outdated ideals of society that have ceased to be beneficial. He is judged, as is his land, by Change. As Kenneth B. Newell explains:

> If, then, the rise of the British civilization must become a fall, its growth a decay, and past realities current illusions, the constant aspect of the civilization must be Change. . . external to and independent of the civilization. (83)

In this society which is failing both Ponderevo and England, he must look inward – always further inward – to find some vestige of reality to which he might cling for survival.

In fact, the episodic nature of the novel itself leads to the idea of isolation or disconnection. Linda R. Anderson has shown that "Each episode is not merely acted out in the novel. . . it is framed by George's generalizing commentary which sets his individual experiences in the context of his era" (205). Thus, the more Ponderevo understands about his society, the more he is drawn inward, and, if not away from it, into a separate but co-existing reality which parallels society. Ponderevo therefore lives a life of contradictions in which women must play a part. It is this aspect of his quest which proves to be so revealing of both Ponderevo and England. He seeks a woman with whom he can happily co-exist, while presented with the reality of how England and its social structures has marginalized women.

We are provided in the opening of *Tono-Bungay* with an analysis of the two major types of women Ponderevo has witnessed as a child. He describes the early contrast he sees between lower-class, schoolmarmish, gossiping women and the stately, almost godlike, social elite. The lower-class women, more at home in the kitchen than in the real world, openly disgust him:

> I hated teatime in the housekeeper's room more than anything else at Bladesover. And more particularly I hated it when Mrs Mackridge and Mrs Booch and Mrs Latude-Fernay were staying in the house. They were, all three of them, pensioned-off servants. Old friends of Lady Drew's had rewarded them posthumously for a prolonged devotion to their minor comforts, and Mrs Booch was also a trustee for a favourite Skye terrier. (18)

Not only do we see through his eyes the "minor" nature of their efforts, but we also find them as "immense"; they "loomed, they bulged, they impended" (18) upon his sensibilities. To young Ponderevo they are figures of some intangible, yet in the long run unimportant, power. These giants loom over the small boy. Their early tea ritual helps feed a psychological uneasiness he will later experience with other women and perhaps provides much of the impetus for his inner need to reverse the cycle and dominate the gender as a whole. Their class has made them haunting to this servant's son, and distasteful.

As for any "noble lower-class" sentiment, Ponderevo dashes this quickly with a whip-like reality in a fashion similar to the observations of George Orwell in *Down and Out in Paris and London*. Ponderevo tells us: "Tea lasted for nearly three-quarters of an hour, and I sat it out perforce; and the day after the talk was exactly the same" (19). These are not the striving lower-class discussing politics over tea, but rather used and discarded women debating the virtues of sugar and the doings of the social elite to which they would never belong.

In sharp contrast, young Ponderevo looked upon Lady Drew and Miss Sommerville,

his first models of the social elite, with a sense of awe: "Head and centre of our system was Lady Drew, her 'ledyship', shrivelled, garrulous, with a wonderful memory for genealogies and very, very old. . ." (15). Though he describes these "ladies" in less than a romantic light, there is a sense of respect and almost worship in his view of them. In fact, he goes so far as to tell us that "When I was a boy I used to always think of these two poor old creatures as superior beings living, like God, somewhere through the ceiling. . . Of course if I came upon them. . . I hid or fled in pious terror" (15). Between these descriptions, we are able to see a bit of the character of Ponderevo emerge. We learn of this early reverence for the empowerment that money brings and his familiarity with the failure of the opposite, yet he seems comfortable with neither extreme. If the rich crones and the poor, overbearing workers are Ponderevo's idea of the Bladesover society which Lodge (117) and Richard Gill (105) have shown is Wells's model for the Condition of England, then we are given the first glance at the narrator's perception of waste and decay as stemming directly from the social status and economic background of the women with whom he has made contact.

Conversely, George describes his mother as a "hard woman" (21), strong, with her own view of society, but limited in respect to what might be considered a rebellion against her plight. When she initially deals with his uncle to gain an apprenticeship for her son, we see her strength and indeed a humanity that he seldom attributes to the women he encounters. However, we never truly see her because George only begins to recognise her himself when it is too late. Leaving his mother to live with his uncle, he has only an undefined sense of loss:

> The thing recurred though I sought to dismiss it; it stuck itself into my memory against the day of fuller understanding. Poor proud, habitual, sternly narrow soul! poor difficult and misunderstanding son! It was the first time that ever it dawned upon me that my mother might perhaps feel. (52)

Later, after her funeral, he begins to understand: "Suddenly I saw her tenderly. . . surprisingly I realised that behind all her hardness and severity she had loved me, that I was the only thing she ever loved" (53). We are presented with a view of a character used by Wells and described by Ponderevo primarily to present issues addressed later in the tale.

Ponderevo's mother, denied by her society and class of the ability to love anyone but her son, is justifiably "hard" and "sternly narrow". However, the question remains of exactly how she was shaped in this manner. She apparently does not fit in with her

friends of the same class and is not allowed any other outlet. The fact that her husband left her gives her the only active role in the novel besides introducing Ponderevo to his uncle, destroying any trace of George's father (21-22). It seems that George only introduces his mother as a device to foreshadow what is to come in his future relationships with women and perhaps to lay a cornerstone hinting at a desire that will shape his life, the search for that missing father-figure which, as Max A. Webb has suggested, adds to his sense of and need for alienation:

> Like individuals, families were coming unhinged from fixed inherited social positions and were "floating" in the turbulent social world of the late nineteenth century, a world of new fortunes caused by change, industrial revolution, imperialism, and advertising. But Uncle Edward is only a kind of substitute or foster-father; Wells also manipulates the reader's interest in the real, absent parent. (244)

In fact, to elaborate on Webb's assertion, we may postulate that Ponderevo quests throughout for both a father and a mother figure, since we see that both have been denied.

As the saying goes, all men seek to marry their mothers. The complexities of Freud aside, the truth of this proves to be Ponderevo's initial downfall – the marriage to Marion. From the beginning, Ponderevo sees and accepts that she is little but a pretty shell of a women, an idea easily juxtaposed with George's short descriptions of his mother: "I told myself [Marion's] simple instincts were worth all the education and intelligence in the world" (100). In fact, the more one looks into the character of Marion, the less one finds. Ponderevo, in part, marries a mirror into which he can gaze to judge his own financial success.

In the early stages of their romance, Marion refuses to marry Ponderevo until he has achieved a suitable position:

> "Don't you love me?"
> She looked [Ponderevo] in the face with grave irresponsive eyes.
> "I don't know," she said. "I like you, of course . . . One has to be sensible. . .". (101)

Thus, he meets, and – after quibbling about how much he should be earning before his position is "suitable" – marries someone who understands and accepts the class system. She is a woman whose training is not "simply of silences, but suppressions" (134). She is Ponderevo's "Poor simple, beautiful, kindly, limited Marion" (134) who interprets life as a series of trials between spending and getting, a concept in which Ponderevo shows little interest. As John Allett explains, "Marion is part of his problem precisely because he does not share her prudery" (371).

That George's and Marion's life together is ended because of an affair is secondary. George admits to being a brute by conducting the affair, sentimental words are exchanged, but in the end their "own resolve carried [them] on [their] predestined way" (162). Predestined indeed, for Ponderevo, looking for something more than the common woman, is stifled, and Marion, having obtained a suitable monetary arrangement and allowed to maintain her honour, is satisfied. Scott explains:

> Wells is apt to inform us about the man's faith in and high expectations from marriage to a physically alluring, feminine woman, or to his proper social choice. But, even if he attains such a match, none of Wells's central male protagonists can maintain it. (111)

Marion is the old-style woman, seeking to better her class, seeking to tie her emotional stability to the idea money itself. The idea of gaining class status and spending power solely via marriage prevents Marion from being anything but a caricature of femininity. Marion *is* the lower middle-class English woman, suppressing her individuality because of the rules and restrictions which apply to her particular stratum, born into and suited to a life of simple acceptance.

In contrast, Ponderevo relates his experiences with the high-class, intelligent Beatrice, a rumination of what Bernard Bergonzi explains is Wells's common theme in his realistic fiction, "the hypergamous aspirations of a low-born hero towards genteel heroines" (56). As children they meet and kiss, and Ponderevo falls in love. However, because of the differences in their social status, the scene ends with fisticuffs. Beatrice's half-brother takes offence at the idea of any play-romance between the two, and Ponderevo fells the young snob. Herein, Ponderevo learns a lesson that will plague him during his experiences – the lesson of denial: "It became apparent to my confused intelligence that I must not say these two had been playing with me. That would not be after the rules of their game. I resolved in this difficult situation upon a sulking silence, and to take whatever consequences might follow" (35)

When the couple are reacquainted years later, near Lady Grove, Ponderevo describes the woman that he is seeking and Wells gives us something more than a shadow of what his New Woman might be like:

> From the first I found her immensely interesting. To me she was a new feminine type altogether – I have made it plain I think how limited was my knowledge of women. But she made me not simply interested in her, but in myself. She became for me something that greatly changes a man's world. How should I put it? She became an audience. Since I've emerged from the emotional developments of the

> affair I have thought it out in a hundred aspects, and it does seem to me that this way in which men and women make audiences for one another is a curiously influential force in their lives. (241)

At this point it becomes crucial to separate the voice of Ponderevo from that of Wells. From Ponderevo's point of view, he has no doubt been influenced by a woman who parallels his thoughts. He sees what might become of his relationship with Beatrice, although his self-centred identity intrudes upon the contemplation. If we are to read this as a Wellsian statement, extracting the character traits evident in Ponderevo, we can see a call for thinking of the individual woman as not an equal of men, yet not an "inferior" and definitely away from the common pool of the class-based English training ground. Although we are led via an egoistical man who needs a woman as an audience, Wells subtly hints that Beatrice would, if she could, find the strength to break free of the restrictions of both class and the text, be something greater than a sounding board: the first depiction of the New Woman Wells details in his later work.

In the narrative, we see how this idea is also doomed to fail *because* of class distinctions. That Beatrice is in love with Ponderevo is not in question; however, despite any lovemaking that may take place between them in a Lawrence-like hideaway beyond the bounds of society, within society such a bond is impossible. Beatrice responds to his pleas to marry him with "I can't do my own hair" and "I have given you all I have, I have given you all I can. But I am a woman spoiled and ruined" (306). Despite any attempt that she might try to make to get away from her social class, to ignore the idea of class itself, she realises that she will be unable to succeed. We see, as Alfred Borrello suggests, "Wells's hatred [and envy?] for the social system which raised up Beatrices" (28), and we find that her class-consciousness forces her to suppress her desires, her chance of a life as an individual with an individual. She is part of a system and finds the idea of escape impossible. As Lucille Herbert observes, "Like Marion. . . Beatrice is finally unable to overcome the limits of her personal and social self" (146).

As for the love relationships of George Ponderevo, he is doomed because he is looking for a woman who in his self-centred view can never exist, and it is doubtful that if indeed he did find such a woman that he would recognize her. On the other hand, would such a woman be interested in Ponderevo? Since the narrative is told from his point of view, the question is perhaps moot, but in *Tono-Bungay* Ponderevo does provide us with two examples of women who have found some degree of equilibrium

between their own identities and the class structures which seek to ensnare their individualities. Excepting their own relationships with Ponderevo, both Effie Rink, the woman with whom he has a brief affair during the waning days of his marriage to Marion, and Aunt Susan seem to find their way out of the traps that English society has set for them.

Effie models the *working*-class woman, a type of woman making her way the best she can with the skills at her disposal. When Ponderevo meets her in the secretarial pool of his uncle's Raggett Street office, he immediately notices something different about her: "Once or twice, meeting casually, we looked at one another for the flash of a second in the eyes. . . . But it was enough in the mysterious freemasonry of sex to say essential things" (155). Although this is a far cry from an observation usually attributed to a strong female character, in light of Ponderevo's narration it is interesting to note the sexual attraction that affected Ponderevo. Costa's claims that "So central is this sexual uneasiness to the fabric of a whole succession of Wells's novels. . .Wells's hostility to monogamy [is] the key to his zealousness for social reform"(89). To read between the lines, Ponderevo has noticed *something* out of the norm in Effie, and Wells perhaps has asked us to take note of what will become a piece in an all but hidden puzzle.[5]

Ponderevo shows us little of Effie except that they initially "came to an understanding" (155) and that "she was in another world from Marion" (168). It is understandable that through Ponderevo's eyes we are given only the frame of Effie's character. She is a strong, self-willed woman who has little emotional need for him. Ponderevo hints to us that success is important to Effie, but it is a success that she will work for in order to obtain, using rather than being used by the capitalist society exploding around her. Although he admits helping her "into an opening she coveted" she "amazed [him] by a sudden display of business capacity": "She has now a typewriting bureau in Riffle's Inn, and she runs it with a brisk vigour and considerable success" (168).

Despite Effie's success, Ponderevo does not let her off completely. He explains that she "still loves her own kind," marrying a "poet given to drugs. . .because he needed nursing" (168). However, Ponderevo misses the irony of the situation which Wells makes clear to the reader. Effie may still be affected by the class structure to some degree, but by not buckling in to its pressure she has taken on the dominant role, found a road to individual empowerment, and along the way preserved her identity.

Ponderevo's Aunt Susan provides us with what may be argued as one of the only truly developed or round characters in *Tono-Bungay*. She is witty, intelligent, and although inextricably tied to her husband's life, she seeks to better herself by attending what amounts to community college courses and by reading authors like George Bernard Shaw. Susan is a social climber who makes it to the top with her husband, but she does so without a real love for the act but for love of him and from a desire to humour him. To George, she is a likeable person from the outset: "She had evidently been the wit and joy of a large circle of schoolfellows, and this style had become a second nature with her. It made her very delightful to me. . . . Her customary walk even had a sort of hello! in it" (63).

When his uncle hits his first setback because of poor business speculation and has to sell the pharmacy to pay off his debts, Susan bears up under the pressure and helps keep things afloat as she and her husband eke out a living on the poor side of London. Later, when the elixir Tono-Bungay makes the couple richer than either of them had ever dreamed, she maintains her common-sense. She endures her husband's requests that she "learn culture" in order to fit in with the more elegant crowds, but on wearing her first dinner-gown, she reflects, "A ham must feel like this" (199). When her husband begins to "take to shopping" (201) as an assumed pastime of the elite, she "did not shine as a purchaser" (202). In fact, she is never able fully to adjust to the idea of being one of the elite and the commodity culture it endorses, telling her nephew, "The Things women are! Do I stink of money?" and "They run their hands over your clothes – they paw you" (202).

We see Susan's inner power clearly as she is forced into a confrontation with her husband after the details of his affair with Mrs Scrymgeour become known. Instead of taking a submissive role, as Marion had over Effie, Susan faces down the "great financier" and makes him surrender his mistress. She tells George, "I'm not going to let him show off what a silly lobster he is to other women" (218) and George records that "It was a triumph for my aunt, but it had its price. For some time it was evident that things were strained between them" (218).

After Uncle Edward's death, Susan finally reveals her previously hidden feelings to her nephew. "It's true," she acknowledges, "that he wasn't a husband much for me at the last. But he was my child, George, he was my child and all my children" (300). Although she admits that she could not prevent what had happened to him, she gives a glimpse into what has helped her maintain her identity; throughout all the illusion,

the financial ups and downs, and the near insanity of her husband, Susan has always maintained a sense of control in their relationship.

Again, as with Effie, we see a determined woman adjusted well to the work ethic, surviving against social pressures. Even though Susan and Edward Ponderevo move into the higher reaches of the class system, she refuses to fall into the trap of adopting an elitist frame of mind. She is capable of playing the part successfully, but the class structure becomes a game to her, not an obsession which takes over her life. Her sense of empowerment comes not from society's arbitrary channels, but from her own strength, born of the ideal of achieving inner happiness rather than simply maintaining outward appearances. We finally see, through Ponderevo's eyes, the idea of oppression that completes Wells's early examination of the obstacles facing a New Woman in English society. During the debate between Ewart the artist and George concerning the idea of Mrs Grundy, we see how English society has purposefully striven to keep women in their place. Mrs Grundy, a character designed to teach children proper manners, takes on a more sinister role when the artist reveals that "There is no Mrs Grundy . . . She's merely an instrument, Ponderevo. She's borne the blame. Grundy's a man" (141). Ewart goes on:

> We've grown up under the terror of Grundy and that innocent – but docile and – yes – formidable lady his wife. . . . His innocence is gone. You can't have your cake and eat it. We're in for knowledge; let's have it plain and straight. I should begin, I think, by abolishing ideas of decency and indecency. . . (143-44)

The artist sees a truth which remains hidden from Ponderevo. Women (and men) have been forced into submission and suffering because of a class-dominated patriarchal society. That Ewart realises Grundy is a man explains the secondary role into which women are forced. A man's model in early twentieth-century could do little more than to oppress women. Ideas of decency and indecency in the sexual arena add to the yoke; if, however, we consider the idea of class structure within this framework, the concept of what is "decent" and "indecent" becomes the argument. Taking into account the rules, restrictions and the "norms" to which women of this period were expected to adhere, there is little wonder that the failure of the individual woman was all but evident. Ewart's stand to abolish such ideas provides us with Wells's path for a freer woman, or, as John Batchelor suggests, we are shown a study "of insubordination, of the drive towards freedom in the socially disadvantaged" (126).

Wells, the skirt-chasing feminist, realised the need for an individual woman – for

humanity's sake, for æsthetic reasons, for the sake of the individual man struggling for survival in an illusory society. John Huntington suggests:

> In his maturity Wells himself wants to see a harmony, based on the "goodwill" in humanity, as the ready and easy way to [a] happy social system. His own anger is reserved, not for the enemy classes as such, but for those people who maintain interest in the face of the manifest need for class cooperation. (25)

Admittedly, by today's standards Wells may seem to fall short of most feminists' expectations, but in his later novels he provides a remarkably fresh and liberal view of the issue for his age. After *Tono-Bungay*, we travel with Wells in *The New Machiavelli* where the male hero must leave his wife for another woman because he is obsessed with challenging the concept of English order; we experience the "electric reaction to [*Ann Veronica*], which called for sexual licence sixty years after Hawthorne's Hester Prynne had quietly accepted the emblem of the scarlet letter" (Costa 69-70), and witness the destructive nature of marital bliss in *Marriage* and *The Passionate Friends*, and follow Wells's further examinations of the problems facing relationships between women and men and of women as individuals in strict, yet decaying, English society. Wells's answers are seldom easy, if indeed he attempts to provide them, for as he continues to write and speak to us from his vantage point in early twentieth-century England, freedom for the self, especially a female self, seems ever more difficult to attain.

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——. *The New Machiavelli*. London: Lane, 1911.
——. *Tono-Bungay*. London: Fisher Unwin, 1909.

Footnotes

1 (i) The first problem is that Wells is a male author. Many contemporary feminist critics may consider any postulate forwarded by a male author as suspect or of less interest than ideas forwarded in texts produced by female writers. In other words, to consider a male author's ideas of feminism (especially those of a 'womanizer' in life) in a male-oriented canon might be considered giving credence to a patriarchal system. As Nina Baym explains: 'If one accepts current theories of American [and other] literature, one accepts as a consequence – perhaps not deliberately but nevertheless inevitably – a literature that is essentially male' (35).

(ii) The second problem lies in the fact that current trends in feminist criticism favour the concept of empowerment rather than an analysis of 'equality' or 'proto-equality'. When adding to this conflict the task of depicting women's roles via materialism or class structure, an avenue which many critics might consider detracts from the issue of feminism itself, to many the soup becomes a bit too thin. K.K.Ruthaven states: "The search for the distinctive features in writing by women is conducted with varying degrees of refinement ... given the widespread belief that women are forcibly silenced in a patriarchy" (107). She goes on to discuss voice, but from the outset we see the emphasis, again not unnaturally, on female writers. In addition to other feminist avenues of criticism currently being explored, which include race considerations, lesbian criticism, etc. we simply find few Marxist-feminist or materialist-feminist critics. However, whether the trend expands or shrinks, critics using ideas from both Marxism and feminism have shown interesting results which stand on their own and aid in the enlightenment and construction of feminist arguments.

2 David Smith, in *H.G. Wells: Desperately Mortal*, briefly examines the portrayal of women and Wells's views concerning women in his journalism and later novels such as *Ann Veronica, The New Machiavelli, Love and Mr Lewisham, In the Days of the Comet, Marriage, The Passionate Friends*, and *The Wife of Sir Isaac Harman*. Bonnie Kime Scott has partially examined Wells's portrayal of women in his social romances. Michael Levenson in *Modernism and the Fate of Individuality: Character in Novelistic Form from Conrad to Woolf* does a good job of describing the concept of the New Woman, but does not directly connect the idea to Wells's work. Nancy Steffen-Fluhr deals with the idea of *The Croquet Player*. Richard Costa examines feminist connections in *In the Days of the Comet, The New Machiavelli, Love and Mr Lewisham, Ann Veronica, Marriage, The Passionate Friends* and *The Wife of Sir Isaac Harman*.

3 K.K. Ruthaven explains that "it should not be a matter of privileging class over gender or vice versa, but of engaging in the much more difficult task of showing how and where such 'interlockings' occur" (28) and Barrett, in: 'Ideology and the Cultural Production of Gender' states that "there has been a fruitful alignment of interests between those who seek to raise the question of gender and its place in Marxist theory, and those who seek to challenge economism in Marxism, insisting on the importance of ideological processes" (66).

4 The authors cite the Wells Archive at the University of Illinois at Urbana.

5 Other authors of this period such as Orwell, Auden et al, describe an element of attraction between middle-class males and lovers who represent a "submerged element" in society. In fairness, one might infer that in addition to doing so to show contrasts within class structures, the authors also felt a need to detail experiences (fictional or not) which reflected their personal desires as sexually driven men.