

possibilities of his childhood. Just what he was escaping from at home for the loss of the Ravensbourne to make such a devastating impact on him, we might ask? Taking account of the mother's absence in *The War in The Air* and of the virtual absence of Remington's mother in the Bromstead section of *The New Machiavelli* - the two novels which deal directly with the suburbanism of Bromley - the destruction of the river and the water meadows may seem to symbolise Wells's loss of his childhood home and his mother's protection.⁹

But there is another aspect to Wells's feelings because not only is Kent threatened by the new world of suburbia, but something new is always being born in the Kent of Wells's imagination, just as the giants in *The Food of The Gods* are born in it, and just as H G himself was. In '42 to '44 he was to remember the magnificent sermon by "the mad priest of Kent", John Ball. "It was in Kent" Wells says, "that the idea of a warless equalitarian communism first found clear expression" (27,28). There are other, more homely images of the new thing being born in and coming out of Kent, such as *The War in The Air*'s progressive Bert Smallways and, even more quintessentially Wellsian, the small boy at Littlestone-on-Sea last seen wheeling his bicycle towards the place on the beach where Bedford, in *The First Men in The Moon*, has parked his Cavorite sphere. As the returned lunar traveller is gorging himself on boiled eggs in the Littlestone hotel, he suddenly hears a sound of "Phoo--Whizz! like a tremendous rocket" (165), and the sphere has gone. "Of course," Bedford reflects, "it was quite clear to me what had happened to the boy. He had crawled into the sphere, meddled with the studs, shut the windows, and gone up" (167). Here is yet another embryonic Great Man of Kent setting off on a voyage from the known to the unknown. Surely, there is something of the spirit of H G Wells in this little boy who, like Remington, but unlike Kipps and Bert Smallways, never comes back?

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⁹ In the Autobiography (1.194), Wells says that he was fifteen or sixteen when "that brown and babbling Ravensbourne between its overhanging trees was suddenly swallowed up by a new drainage system."

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Sylvia Hardy

A Feminist Perspective on H.G. Wells

As I began revising this paper, which originated as a contribution to last year's Weekend Conference, "Reappraising H.G. Wells," it occurred to me that in that same year, 1996, I became the first female Chairman of the H.G. Wells Society. The fact that current language usage

requires me to describe myself as a *chairman* does in itself raise interesting issues in relation to the ones I want to raise about Wells.

I am starting from the assumption that a feminist perspective on H.G. Wells must inevitably address the question: was Wells himself a feminist? There is no doubt that for much if not all of his career he was identified with what was called "the woman question" and thus with feminist concerns, and was considered to be sympathetic to the feminist cause (although the word "feminism" itself, or course, was not used at that time). What is more, this is still a debatable issue in an assessment of Wells's work as a writer - the exchanges between Michael Foot and Jill Craigie in the BBC's 1996 *Bookmark* programme on Wells came back again and again to this issue. There seems, in fact, to have been a common assumption in the late nineteenth-early twentieth century, that prominent figures in the radical, socialist, free-thinking movements - "right-thinking, or rather, left-thinking men" as Wells once put it - would *also* be upholders of women's rights. But how accurate was that impression? How far is it justified to claim H.G. Wells as a feminist?

It would be easy to quote passages from the letters and writings of contemporary young women, of all classes, who were inspired and by H.G. Wells's work - young women who certainly felt liberated by his ideas. In 1912, for instance, an uneducated young working class woman called Ruth Slate, then 28 years old, to her friend, Eva Slawson:

I wanted to read you wild, splendid passages from Wells - how he stirs the rebel in one! I have just lived in the closing chapters of *The New Machiavelli*. You must read it one day - when you feel quite calm and strong and able to master the slumbering volcanoes. (*Dear Girl* 158-59)

But it would be just as easy to cite passages written by women of that period which are highly critical of Wells's ideas, so selective quotation does not get us very far.

The first step, then, must be to decide what we're talking about. As Professor Joad would say, "it all depends what you mean by 'feminism'". C.E.M. Joad (1891-1953) was a regular figure on the BBC programme, *The Brains Trust*, in the 1940s, and a friend of H.G. Wells. As a philosopher, Joad insisted on defining terms before starting to argue about them, and although he was for a time a follower of Wells, he later became critical of what he saw as the impracticality of some of H.G.'s ideas, and he castigated him for not defining his terms - after one particularly critical review, Wells called Joad a "philosophical defective". Some definition of feminism is

required, though - the 1996 *Bookmark* programme chose to concentrate on H.G.'s sex-life, but the analyses were marred by a very imprecise and shifting idea of what was implied by the term "feminism". There are a vast number of ways of defining it, and strong disagreements about aims and strategies among feminists themselves, but I would argue that two principles underlie Anglo-American approaches.

The first generally accepted basic principle is the distinction feminists make between sex and gender, summed up by Simone de Beauvoir in 1949, when she states unequivocally, "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman". Of course feminists are not denying that there are biological differences between men and women, but they see gender - the attitudes and expectations we have of men and women, about the way we think men and women should look, speak, behave, and so on - as *social* constructs. The way we learn to see ourselves, the way we learn to think of ourselves and of how we should behave is conveyed by how we are treated by our families, by our schools, by the books we read, the films we see and so on - in short, by the historically-shaped society and culture we happen to have been born into.

The second generally accepted basic principle - which is inextricably related to the first - is the acceptance that history is the record of the achievements of a male-dominated society - as Virginia Woolf puts it, "Women have no history":

[Women's history] lies at present locked in old diaries, stuffed away in old drawers, half-obliterated in the memories of the aged. It is to be found in the lives of the obscure - in those almost unlit corridors of history where the fugues of generations of women are so dimly, so fitfully perceived. For very little is known about women. The history of England is the history of the male line, not of the female. Of our fathers we know always some fact, some distinction. They were soldiers or they were sailors; they filled that office or they made that law. But of our mothers, our grandmothers, our great grandmothers, what remains? Nothing but a tradition.

If our record of the past is His-story, seldom her-story, then the way women are defined and viewed - and thus the way they define themselves has always been determined for them - and although we may argue about the extent to which this is still true in 1997 it was certainly true of the society which shaped Wells and of the one he depicted in his writing.

So how can we determine whether or not H.G. Wells was a feminist? We can, for instance, look at what he says about the "Woman Question" in his political and sociological writing - and he has a great deal to say on this issue. We can compare what he says with the way

he actually behaved towards the women in his life - together with the justifications and explanations he gives of his behaviour in the various volumes of his autobiography. And lastly, we can look at the way he depicts women in his fiction - and this, I shall argue, is by far the most revealing, interesting, and defensible approach. I want, then, to look briefly at all three of these approaches, with reference to some of the comments which have been made about them by various biographers and critics

What H.G. Wells has to say about the woman question in his political and sociological writing

There seems to me no doubt that many of H.G. Wells's ideas about women's position in society were both enlightened and advanced, far-thinking for his day. His opposition to the legally sanctioned notion of private ownership in marriage, for instance, which saw women and children as patriarchal possessions with little or no say over their own lives is now, as Patricia Stubbs points out in her feminist study of women in the Victorian and Edwardian novel, "a commonplace of socialist-feminist thinking, but when Wells was saying it, his was an isolated voice" (185). He was, too, one of the first to argue that women would never achieve the freedom and independence they sought until they had control over their own bodies, and thus he was a life-long supporter of the birth-control movement. He saw that without *economic* freedom there can be no independence - Wells's ideas on this point are positively Marxist - hence his plans for Endowed Motherhood - a system whereby the state would pay a wage to any woman who was, or was about to become a mother. This would replace the patriarchal family structure by the power of the socialist state, enabling women to be economically and socially independent of men - the much later Child Allowance, paid directly to the mother, went some way to establishing this. Ann Veronica, who has heard of this idea from the Fabians Miss Miniver introduces her to, sees Endowed Motherhood as a utopian ideal, which would enable her to choose the man she wants - "If one was free," she said, 'One could go to him. This vile hovering to catch a man's eye. One could go to him and tell him one loved him" (*Ann Veronica* 161).

In *Anticipations* (1901), in *A Modern Utopia* (1905) and in his 1906 address to the Fabian Society, "Socialism and the Family", Wells challenged traditional ideas about marriage and sexual relations and suggested radical, revolutionary alternatives, to an extent that shocked many

of his contemporaries and alarmed his fellow-Fabians. His 1906 fantasy, *In the Days of the Comet*, envisages a world in which a mysterious extraterrestrial gas from a passing comet had transforms the whole of Britain into a land of peace and harmony, where proprietorial love and jealousy no longer exist and free love is the norm. The review of the book in the *Times Literary Supplement* commented sourly: "Socialistic men's wives, we gather, are, no less than their goods, to be held in common" (*TLS*, 14 September, 1906)

But to what extent do these ideas reflect a genuine desire to see women as free and equal beings, enjoying the same privileges as men? It could be argued that Wells's readiness to jettison the family was not for feminist reasons. Several feminist critics have suggested, in fact, that his ideas about free-love can be seen as advancing male rather than female interests - in the case of the young women in the so-called Fabian Nursery, his own - "we can see that his interest in free-love and the sexual liberation of women of women was too closely related to his own needs," (190) says Patricia Stubbs sternly - and Endowed Motherhood raises as many problems as it solves. A feminist perspective acknowledges that at least Wells was moving in the right direction and understood something of the economic aspects of women's oppression, but is nonetheless aware that his plan for a New Republic does nothing to free women from the constraints of domesticity.

And these criticisms are not restricted to overtly feminist writers. In their biography of Wells, *The Time Traveller*, the Mackenzies conclude that Wells "was at best a fellow-traveller of the feminists" (283). They point out, for instance, that he always had far more to say about the economics and eugenics of motherhood than about the education and employment of women - the necessary route to freedom and equality. They question, too, whether Wells's ideas about the New Woman extend beyond envisaging her as a fit and appropriate mate for the New Republican Man; "the question of female emancipation," they suggest, "becomes a matter of making such relationships possible rather than a search for formal equality between men and women" (283). Interestingly, when he offers a retrospective analysis of his ideas about the Women's Movement in his *Autobiography*, Wells recalls that his first reaction to the growing demand on the part of women for economic and political independence was based on this idea: "at first it seemed to me that here at last advancing upon me was that great-hearted free companionship of noble women of which I had dreamed from my earliest years" (483).

But however one assesses Wells's ideas about marriage and motherhood, his attitude to women's political aspirations cannot in any respect be seen as feminist. Admittedly he makes out a good case for considering the WSPU - the Women's Social and Political Union - as too narrow in its approach, and he was by no means alone in this view. Rebecca West - whose feminist credentials have never been called into question - shared some of his reservations about this organisation. In her articles in the *Freewoman* (1912-14), she too challenges what she sees as the blinkered view of certain middle-class women in the WSPU who, she claims, seem not to have realized that the emancipation of women cannot be achieved at a stroke merely by getting the vote. Such a change, she argues, would require huge and fundamental changes in attitudes and in social structures. "It is strange," she writes, "that the middle-class woman, who forms the backbone of the suffrage societies, should believe that one can superimpose the emancipation of women on the social system as one sticks a halfpenny stamp on a postcard" (112). This is precisely the attitude of the "the aggressive and disagreeable" Kitty Brett, who is presented in *Ann Veronica* as one of the most prominent and conspicuous members of the militant suffrage movement. When Ann Veronica asks about the goals of the movement, Kitty Brett answers "Freedom! Citizenship! And the way to that - the way to everything - is the vote" (165).

But although, writing in his *Autobiography* twenty years later, Wells defends and offers a reasoned explanation for his opposition to the suffrage movement, it would be difficult to see his one-sided depiction of its followers in his fiction as anything other than anti-feminist. The suffragettes who appear in *Ann Veronica* and *The Wife of Sir Isaac Harman* are portrayed as ridiculous figures which draw on contemporary stereotypes. It is significant that Miss Miniver, the most prominent representative of the movement in the former novel, is described as physically unattractive - "Miss Miniver looked out on the world through large emotional blue eyes that were further magnified by the glasses she wore, and her nose was pinched and pink" (27) - anti-feminist slogans at that time often castigated the suffragettes as women who had embraced the cause because no-one would embrace them. Her appearance also denotes an absurd fanaticism. On her visit to Ann Veronica in London, we are told, "There was a wild light in her eye, and her straight hair was out demonstrating and suffragetting upon some independent notions of its own" (107). What is worse, we are told that Miss Miniver is not very bright. She possesses "a weakly rhetorical mind" (33) incapable of logical reasoning or sustaining an argument, and to

Ann Veronica's dismay, Miss Miniver's "long, confused and emphatic discourse on the position of women, full of wonderful statements" degenerates into a "fluent muddle" (30). But, perhaps most significantly of all, Wells reserves his deepest scorn for the repressed feelings of excitement underlying Miss Miniver's disgust for male sexuality. On such occasions, we learn, "A flush of excitement crept into her cheeks" (30), her face acquires "an unaccustomed pink" (144). The other suffragette mentioned in the novel, Kitty Brett, also sees sex antagonism as a necessary part of the women's movement, at least for as long as women are unable to obtain justice (189) - and the paranoia of suffragettes as man-haters is another stereotype of the period. Patricia Stubbs queries whether Wells's own responses to sexuality, the fact that he saw women "in an exclusively sexual light" made him particularly resistant to anything he saw as "militantly anti-sex" (187). When she is in prison, Ann Veronica, who represents the voice of reasonable womanhood in the novel, finds herself "in a phase of violent reaction" against her fellow suffragettes, having decided that women divide into those who are and those who are not hostile to men. "The real reason I am out of place here," she said, "is because I like men. I can talk with them. I've never found them hostile" (180).

I do feel, however, that although I certainly cannot accept all of Wells's proposed solutions for the Woman Question, and although I find his ideas about suffragettes are wholly unacceptable in feminist terms, he does show a far greater awareness of the economic and social constraints that constrained women in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries than do most of his contemporaries. Going back to the basic principles of feminism which I outlined earlier, there seems little doubt that Wells was aware that women had been oppressed and thwarted by history, in the sense of the male-dominated culture and cultural attitudes that had shaped and were limiting their lives, and he did attempt to do something about it - and to this extent, he can be described as a feminist.

Wells's treatment of women

But when we look at the treatment of women in his own life, the question becomes more complicated. Whenever the subject of H.G. Wells and feminism crops up, the details of his relationship with his wife and his liaisons with other women are then raised, leading inevitably to a discussion of the extent to which his treatment of the women in his life measure up to the ideals I have been outlining. I have no intention of going into detail about biographical matters, but I do

want to look at one or two issues from a feminist perspective. The first is that the source of most of what we know about H.G. Wells's love life is Wells himself. In his 1933 *Experiment in Autobiography* he tells us about the *modus vivendi* he worked out with his wife: "We came at last to a very explicit understanding about the profound difference in our physical and imaginative responses" he writes (464) and he goes on for three more pages about the details of the arrangement which enabled him to have affairs - "passades" as he calls them, whilst Jane retained the status - and responsibilities of wife and mother. Even the choice of her name was his; Amy Catherine became Jane - "and Jane she came and remained" - although he concedes that *she* liked the name Catherine, and, as David Smith has recently discovered, she always used the name when referring to herself and in personal letters, not only in the more formal circumstances Wells describes in this passage. In fairness to Wells, he is honest enough to acknowledge that the arrangement suited him admirably, and that he could preach the doctrines of free love "with no thought of how I would react if presently my wife were to carry them into effect, since she was so plainly not disposed to carry them into effect" (436). From a feminist perspective, however, it would be interesting to know just what Catherine did think about the *modus vivendi* - to know how much choice she had? When the arrangement was agreed, she was, after all, at a stage in her life when she was ill-equipped to earn her own living, with responsibility for two small boys?

So far as the other women in H.G. Wells's life are concerned, again our main source of information is the writer himself. In the posthumously published third volume of his autobiography, *H.G. Wells in Love*, he goes into considerable detail about the part sex played in his life, and about his life-long Jungian search for his anima figure, the lover-shadow which would complete him. Again, from a feminist perspective, even the frankness and attempts at honesty often sound like rationalizations, although, interestingly, male biographers seem perfectly happy with Wells's claim that he got what he gave in these extra-marital relationships: "...the exchanges were fairly equal," he writes, "two libertines met - and when I got a woman, a woman got a man" (61). I have read enough of Elizabeth von Arnim's writings to know that Wells's account of their relationship is very one-sided, and, in fact, that his interpretation of what she was thinking and feeling was far from the truth as she saw it. From any perspective, his description of Odette Keun as a "prostitute-housekeeper" is pretty distasteful - and again, it would be interesting to hear her side of their relationship, which, after all, lasted for nine years. Admittedly both

Amber Reeves and Rebecca West are on record as saying that they did not regret the time they spent with H.G. Wells - certainly a tribute to his attractiveness - but then, too, both women had invested an important part of their lives in these relationships.

In any case, given the social taboos of the period, could the situation have been as equal for men and women in an illicit love affair as Wells would like us to believe? Although he makes out a good theoretical case for freer sexual relations, two of his young mistresses - Amber Reeves and Rebecca West - bore him children, and it is clear that it was their lives, and not his, which were subsequently determined by these events. Rebecca West certainly felt that her literary career had been hampered because she was for a time obliged to live in the country with her young son, whilst Amber Reeves, who seemed likely to have a brilliant future - she had, after all, attained a double first in the Cambridge Moral Science Tripos at the height of the affair with Wells - retired into domesticity. As Ruth Brandon puts it in *The Young Women and the Old Men*, "Whatever Amber's intellectual potential may have been, she was never given a chance to realise it. By the time the obsession with H.G. Wells had abated she had a husband and, more to the point, a baby" (187).

But although I would argue that from a feminist perspective, Wells's behaviour towards women cannot be seen as acceptable - I am by no means sure that it matters in relation to his writing. Should the ideas and achievements of a writer be assessed in terms of his life? Are Rousseau's ideas about education, for instance, to be dismissed out of hand because his five children finished up in foundling homes?

Depiction of Women in his fiction

When it comes down to it, what matters in our assessment of a writer is the writing, and as I said at the beginning, I think the *best* way of answering questions about Wells feminism, the best way of making assessments about his attitudes towards women and his ideas about the part they should play in the world, is to look at the way they are depicted in his fiction. The choices an author makes in his portrayal of character, I would maintain, are ultimately far more revealing as an indication of what he *really* thinks, than anything he may choose to say about his beliefs and attitudes.

Now I am not denying that Wells has created some very striking and often very funny female characters. I love the fiercely defensive Mrs Larkin in *The History of Mr Polly*, for

instance, or the formidable Lady Beach Mandarin in *The Wife of Sir Isaac Harman* whose every appearance is associated with maritime imagery.

I must admit that Lady Beach-Mandarin was almost as much to meet as one can meet in a single human being, a broad abundant billowing personality with a taste for streamers, pennants, panniers, loose sleeves, sweeping gestures; top notes and the like that made her less like a woman than an occasion for public rejoicing. (*The Wife of Sir Isaac Harman* 40)

Lady Beach-Mandarin is usually seen as a portrayal of Countess Warwick, but having read Wells's correspondence with an equally impressive aristocratic figure, Victoria, Lady Welby, I'm pretty sure that she made a contribution.

Wells is good, too, on convincing and sympathetic portraits of the women he sees as the casualties of the repressive society that has shaped them. There is a striking emphasis in Wells's fiction on a certain kind of mother - mothers who love their children but are so constrained by rigid ideas of conduct - usually connected with sex - that they find it difficult, if not impossible, to establish relationships with them. Richard Remington's mother, in *The New Machiavelli* is typical. Looking back, Remington finds it difficult to understand how his mother could have been so unresponsive to his father, "the most lovable of weak spasmodic men": "But my mother had been trained in a hard and narrow system that made evil out of many things not in the least evil, and inculcated neither kindness or charity" (58). In *Tono-Bungay*, the words "hardness" and "severity" (74) characterize George Ponderevo's recollections of his mother; only later does he begin to understand why there were barriers between them: "Poor proud, habitual, sternly narrow soul! poor difficult and misunderstanding son!" (72) Many mothers in Wells's novels find it impossible to talk to their children about sexual matters. In *Tono-Bungay*, George Ponderevo ascribes the failure of his marriage to the fact that "the make-up of Marion's mind in the matter was an equally irrational affair":

Her training had been one not simply of silences, but suppressions. An enormous force of suggestion had so shaped her that the intense natural fastidiousness of girlhood had developed into an absolute perversion of instinct. For all that was cardinal in this essential business of life she had but one inseparable epithet - "horrid." (200-201)

In these early novels, of course, Wells is writing about Victorian constraints, of a world in which, as Sarnac records in *The Dream*, there was "profoundest ignorance of the body" and people "even bore children by accident" (72). But similar attitudes are evident in the novels of the twenties and thirties. Christina Alberta remembers her mother as "a concentrated incarnate 'Don't'" (*Christina*

Alberta's Father 278) and Stella Kentlake's mother in *Babes in the Darkling Wood* is perhaps the most inhibited of all. Brought up by aunts who avoid the subject so far as possible - "Not very much was said, but much was implied" (150) - she has "a powerful, negative preoccupation with sex" (162). She wants desperately to warn her daughter about the dangers of men and is anxious to discover the extent of her experience but "so great was her agoraphobia of plain language that she was no more capable of putting such a question directly than of playing matador in a bull-fight, naked before ten thousand people" (160).

So Wells does often show considerable understanding of the social constraints which have warped the characters and hence the lives of some of his women characters, but of more importance, from a feminist perspective, is the part which women play in the narrative. In any fiction, the general impression the reader comes away with depends not so much from what happens in the story as from the way the story is told. *Who* is telling us the story? whose *voice* is heard most often? whose *viewpoint* of events and peoples are we given? In his novels and short-stories, Wells explores a number of different ways of telling the story - sometimes quite experimentally - but I cannot think of any novel except *Ann Veronica* where the perspective is predominantly that of a woman, and even in this book the focus changes in the last two chapters, where we are no longer given a consistent insight into the heroine's thoughts. In a later novel, *Christina Alberta's Father*, where the eponymous heroine is central to the story and presented as a nineteen-twenties Ann Veronica, the focalization switches half-way through the book from an omniscient third-person narrator to one of the characters, who misinterprets events because he understands less than the reader.

Another aspect of Wells's story-telling technique is that his women characters, even when they are making a case for freedom are ultimately subordinating themselves to the interests of men. This is a point taken up by Rebecca West in her review of *The Passionate Friends* for *The New Freewoman*. Here she claims that Wells finds it impossible to think of women except in relation to men. Wells's claim in *The Passionate Friends* is that sexual antagonism and jealous greed are at the root of male/female problems, but West concludes that the attitude to life conveyed in the book "creates an atmosphere that is favourable to that poisoned growth" because, she argues, "jealousy is the complaint of the incomplete self. The woman who is acting the

principal part in her own ambitious play is unlikely to weep because she is not playing a part in some man's no more ambitious play" (84-85).

Not only does Wells seldom place his female characters centre stage, he is also reluctant to let them finish their education. Heroines may enter higher education but they are obliged to leave for minor misdemeanours, like Christina Alberta, because of overwork, like Margaret in *The New Machiavelli*, or because their fathers refuse to pay for them, like Marjorie Pope, the heroine of *Marriage*, or Ann Veronica, whose father believed that education unsexed a woman. Cliona Murphy, who raises interesting questions about Wells and female education in her essay "Educationalist, Utopian, Feminist", suggests that because Wells's idea of women's ultimate role was "as breeders for the world state, he generally seems to have disliked the idea of a nation of independent educated women as entities in themselves" (224-25).

This notion leads directly to *Ann Veronica*, considered by most commentators to be Wells's most feminist novel. In terms of a conventional feminist reading my women students were always impressed by Wells's approach to female sexuality. Not only does he show Ann Veronica as a sexual being, he even suggests that there should be free and guiltless sexual choice between men and women, one, moreover, which does not have to be initiated by the man. Writing about *Ann Veronica* in his *Autobiography* many years later, Wells suggests that this was the "particular offence" which aroused so much outrage when the novel first appeared:

Ann Veronica was a virgin who fell in love and showed it, instead of waiting as all popular heroines had hitherto done, for someone to make love to her. It was held to be an unspeakable offence that an adolescent female should be sex-conscious before the thing was forced upon her attention. But Ann Veronica wanted a particular man who excited her and she pursued him and got him. With gusto. (470)

Even today, Ann Veronica's unabashed directness comes as something of a shock – take her approach to Capes, for instance. When he asks "What do you want?" she replies with a single word: "You!", and even after he has told her about his marriage and urged caution, Ann Veronica still insists: "I want you. I want you to be my lover. I want to give myself to you. I want to be whatever I can to you." She paused for a moment. "Is that plain?" she asked" (252).

Nonetheless, the ending of the book presents a problem. Not only does Ann Veronica fail to achieve the independence and autonomy she had hoped for, when she falls in love with her instructor and runs away with him she abandons her route to independence - the scientific

education she had wanted so badly - with scarcely a backward glance. What is more, the novel ends with a conventional marriage, and Ann Veronica happily pregnant and reconciled with her family. It's true that to allow Ann Veronica a happy future after she has defied her father, run away with a married man and "lived in sin" was in itself a provocative slap in the face of Edwardian conventional opinion – in other novels of the period, fictional heroines who broke the rules were punished by death or exiled to Australia - but from a feminist perspective what matters is the ideological premise which underlies the novel's ending. Ann Veronica is about choice, but for Wells, the biologist and Darwinist, there are some areas of human life where choice is not available; "things are so," as Ann Veronica puts it, because the good of the species requires it. So far as Wells is concerned, men and women have evolved to perform different functions, and woman's role is motherhood. Thus, he advocates the social equality and personal freedom of women, but only insofar as such emancipation can be reconciled with the evolutionary process and the ultimate good of the state. Ann Veronica may have been given the right to choose the mate she wants, but there's no doubt about who is going to stay home and look after the children! Not only is her break for freedom shown to be in reality an unconscious search for a mate - "You came out like an ant for your nuptial flight," Capes tells her - but she also embraces the role which the evolutionary process has determined for her with gusto, disclaiming modernity: "Modernity indeed! She was going to be as primordial as chipped flint" (260).

In conclusion, then, and speaking from a feminist perspective, I would argue that although H.G. Wells *did* make a positive contribution to the feminist cause at an intellectual and theoretical level, the portrayal of women in his fiction reveals ambivalences, uncertainties, a deep-seated reluctance to come to terms with women as free, equal human beings. This is an inevitable outcome of Wells's essentialist view of sexual difference. He does not see gender as a social construct, and since he does not see temperamental and psychological differences between women and men as culturally produced, he cannot be seen as a feminist in terms of the definition I suggested earlier.

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Compiled by Patrick Parrinder, Professor of English, University of Reading

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OBITUARY

We regret to announce that George Hay, who was Chairman of the Society from 1975-1978, died on 3 October following an operation.

George became Chairman at a very difficult time, when the Society was seeking to re-establish itself after a long period of quiescence. He inspired all who knew him with his energy and enthusiasm, and his total commitment to the Society and the works of H.G. Wells. His zest and drive were infectious, and he possessed the ability to enthuse the committee to give of their best. Despite his encyclopaedic knowledge of science fiction and his undoubted skills as a Chairman, he remained a modest man and was always courteous and kind.

In addition to his work for the Society, George was instrumental in persuading a leading paperback publisher to re-issue a number of Wells' titles which had been long out of print including *Star Begotten*, *Men like Gods*, *The Food of the Gods* and *A Story of Days to Come*. He edited a number of anthologies for the Penguin Science Fiction series including the excellent *Pulsar* anthologies containing pieces by Wells, Isaac Asimov and others.

As Chairman, George steered the Society through some difficult waters, and when he handed over the Chairmanship to Bob Watkins in 1978, he left it in much better shape than he had found it. We are indebted to George for his sterling contribution to our work, and we will remember him with affection.

John Hammond