

Shadows and Glimpses

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Tania Alexander, *A Little of All These; An Estonian Childhood* London (Cape) 1987, 168 pp. £12.50

New items related to H.G. Wells still appear. This memoir, from the pen of Tania Alexander, Moura Budberg's daughter, offers us a glimpse of the life of Moura and her children, after the Russian Revolution, and throughout the interwar period. Moura practised a rather peripatetic life, going from Florence to London, to Estonia, and elsewhere, while the children were raised on the estates of their father in Estonia. It was a rather idyllic world, at least according to this book, as the affairs of the outside world did not intrude very much. The family spent one rather lovely summer in Sorrento with Gorky, with whom Moura remained intimate. At other times, especially in 1934, H.G. Wells came to Lake Kallijärv, and this memoir has some unusual candid photographs of Wells at the lake, with the children, when he came and visited Moura and her family.

Not much new is provided about Wells, except to help solidify the notion that Moura, much as she cared for him, did not love him, remaining true, in her own fashion, to another. Wells continued to desire her, not only as mistress and companion, but as his wife. She refused again and again, and remained elusive. For Wells, the lover shadow he so poignantly discusses in *H.G. Wells in Love*, remained just a shadow. Moura was simply one of his greatest loves - with Isabel, Amy Catherine, and Amber. Just as others of his loves hoped always that he would marry them, he hoped, to the end, that Moura would marry him. Some new and appealing vignettes of that relationship occur in this book.

Moura remained elusive, but not just to H.G. Others such as Bruce Lockhart and Gorky also remained in love with her. She remained true to her first love, even after his death, and although she moved about the world with great panache, she also remained alone. Translating from the French (some of the better Simenon translations are hers), moving in the world of high fashion, and higher culture, she lived on until her world was essentially gone. Those who were at the grand funeral remember the isolation of the room, the grand spectacle, and the driving rain outside. For those lucky enough to have seen a television documentary, made for the

BBC, but shown only by the CBC as far as I can tell, *Citizen Baroness*, produced by R. Lovat Dickson, she seemed a bit less shadowy, and extremely attractive. One could easily understand why Wells and the others found her so charming and so interesting. This book provides even more of a look at that personage and from the acknowledgements, one might deduce that it was the documentary which provided the impetus for this book.

Other interesting characters appear in the book, Tania's governess, the illegitimate child of Maud Gonnet, and the person who really raised the children as Moura remained in Russia, remote to these children on the isolated estate, is perhaps the least known, but we also get a good picture of Bruce Lockhart, whom Tania believes was the only true love of her mother's life. If this is true, Moura herself was pursuing a "lover shadow."

New and interesting details of H.G.'s life in London are offered as she describes her own life once she had come to London to live. Tania worked for Secker and Warburg, helped to edit *La France Libre* during the second world war, thus helping to ease Wells's connections with both perhaps. Finally the book deals with the possible undercover activities of Moura. Tania believes that her mother embroidered the story of her life, and used the rumours which spread about her as fuel to her mystique. And, was very probably not a spy at all.

There cannot be many more memoirs left from those close to H.G. Wells. There are one or two unpublished items concerning his life with Jane, and they are being readied for possible publication by this writer. A bundle of letters, supposedly in Florence, have been offered for sale, but withdrawn. They may be Moura's (she died in Tuscany), but probably are Odette Keun's. The odd item appears in the sales advertisements, and occasionally emerges from obscure collections. But most materials now are known. For that reason, this book, by someone who knew Wells, who liked him, and who is able to talk about him and her remarkable mother, is a pleasure to read. It helps our knowledge, while being well written and well illustrated. Wells addicts and others who are interested in the hidden corners of life between the wars will enjoy it very much.