

sat down for the festivities. I thought of them, however, and of H.G. Wells which made the procedure easier to go through. And this history helps me recall the earlier days of the Society even more.

Book Review: The H.G. Wells Collector's Monograph Series, Number One. *The Atlantic Edition: A 28 Volume Set of the Works of H.G. Wells*, by Gordon D. Feir (Southern Maple Publishers, 2000). 28 pp. [By Sylvia Hardy]

In the General Introduction to the Atlantic Edition of his works, H.G. Wells questions whether the word 'works' is applicable to his publications. He prefers the word 'writings', partly because he rejects the notion of permanence for any work of art and also because he sees his own products as 'miscellaneous and uneven'. But, he concludes, 'There is only one graceful response to this compliment, and that is to take himself as seriously as he has been taken, and to set out his writings with as brave a face as possible'. How, I wonder, would he have reacted to this monograph, which is wholly devoted to the Atlantic Edition? In the event, of course, the Atlantic Edition was, as Gordon Feir points out, 'a milestone in Wells's publishing history' because the 28-volume project obliged him to reread and revise his texts, and to some extent rethink them – the introductions to the various volumes provide fascinating insights into his thinking at this period. It has also become an important source of reference for scholars and is still the nearest thing we have to a collected edition.

Feir writes that the aim of this bibliographic monograph is to make information about the Edition available to other readers and collectors. To this end he gives details of its publication and of Wells's role as supervisor. There is a complete list of the contents of the 28 volumes, together with comprehensive notes on design and characteristics. The booklet includes full-page colour plates illustrating the binding of the UK and US editions, sample pages from volume VIII, and a reproduction of the photograph of Wells which formed the frontispiece of volume I. The section on Current Distribution is fascinating, and an indicator of the time and trouble the author has taken over this compilation. I had no idea so many sets had been broken up and sold separately – although I do remember that twenty or so years ago a bookseller offered me a signed copy of volume I for £60 which I declined – I

probably did not have the money at the time, though I have often wished since that I had bought it. From this account of current availability and sales prices it looks as though it is highly unlikely that I will achieve my life-time dream of one day discovering a complete (and cheap) set of the Atlantic Edition. I highly recommend this monograph to all readers interested in H.G. Wells, and it is a must for collectors.

Book Review: *The Spinster and the Prophet: A tale of H.G. Wells, plagiarism and the history of the world*, by A.B. McKillop (London: Aurum, 2001). 452 pp. [By Sylvia Hardy]

Like all Wellsians I had heard of the Florence Deeks case. I knew that in 1928 an obscure Canadian woman had charged H.G. Wells with plagiarising her unpublished manuscript in *The Outline of History*, and there seemed no reason to doubt that the accusation was absurd. *The Spinster and the Prophet* takes a very different approach. It was published in Toronto last year with a very different subtitle – *Florence Deeks, H.G. Wells, and the Mystery of the Purloined Past* (Toronto: Macfarlane, 2001) – a title which, in fact, provides a more accurate description of a book that attempts to redress the balance by giving as much attention to Wells's hitherto unknown accuser as it does to the great writer himself.

The case rested on the fact that in the autumn of 1918, when Wells was planning his history of the world, Deeks left her manuscript, 'The Web', a history of the world which covered the same period, with the Canadian branch of Macmillans. Significantly, this was the publishing house which had brought out a number of Wells's novels, and with which he still had a number of contacts. During this period (six or eight months, the plaintiff and the publishers disagreed about the dates) it was possible that the manuscript could have been sent to London and Wells could have had access to it. The prosecution alleged that this must have occurred, not only because Wells (a non-historian) could not possibly have written 250,000 words of *The Outline* between November and July without such an aid, but also because internal (textual) evidence showed that it was Deeks's manuscript that he had drawn on. The structure and overall plan of 'The Web' and *The Outline of History* were, it was claimed, very similar, and there were sentences and whole passages which were almost identical. What is more, the same omissions and errors appeared in both texts.

Admittedly the perspectives of the two writers were very different: Deeks had set out to write a radical account of women's importance in history whilst Wells focussed on men's achievements and gave little attention to the role of women, but even this was presented as evidence of guilt, as an attempt to disguise plagiarism. A number of expert witnesses were called on to support these claims, the most interesting of these from the English point of view being I.A. Richards, a literary critic with a particular interest in language who was highly influential in the nineteen-twenties. Richards did not appear in court, in fact he doubted whether there was enough evidence to prevail in a court of law, but there was, he believed, 'sufficient to arouse a strong suspicion'. Deeks lost the case, went to appeal, even took her case to the British Privy Council, and the whole affair dragged on until 1933.

The Spinster and the Prophet describes the court cases in great detail and offers its own resolution to the mystery. Starting from the assumption that Wells – 'a writer desperate to find a way of gaining an adequate command over the entire course of history' – could not have written 250,000 words of *The Outline of History* at such a speed without help, McKillop suggests that the manuscript was, in fact, sent to England. He constructs an elaborate conspiracy theory involving Macmillans of Canada (eager to curry favour with the parent company by '[securing Wells] once again to the Macmillan stable') as instigator; Sir Richard Gregory (Wells's lifelong friend and editor of *Nature*, a Macmillan publication) as intermediary; and Jane Wells ('a wife willing to help her husband in any way she can' with her own future stability in mind) as facilitator. The book as a whole has been working towards this resolution. The detailed description of Wells's love affairs, for instance, otherwise irrelevant, seeks to establish connections between sexual infidelity and plagiarism. McKillop cites Wells's willingness to adopt other writers' plots and ideas and comments:

This was a pattern of behaviour no less portentous than the one that existed in his relationships with women. Although he did not recognize it as such, it was another form of betrayal, trust violated by personal need and for personal gain.

From the beginning, too, the author draws parallels between Florence Deeks and Jane Wells, seeing them both a victims of patriarchy in general and of H.G. Wells in particular.

Ingenious though it is, McKillop's explanation does not convince, and this is partly because its basic premises are unsustainable. One thing we do know for certain about Wells is that he had the capacity to write at tremendous speed when the occasion demanded, and the textual similarities between 'The Web' and *The Outline* could be ascribed to the use of the same texts – neither writer was working from primary sources. But even more fundamental so far as the explanation is concerned is the gap between evidence and speculation which increases as the book proceeds. McKillop acknowledges in his preface that there are problems with evidence; while there is a vast amount of material about H.G. Wells, there is very little about Florence Deeks: 'For a woman with a strong sense of history,' he writes, 'Florence Deeks left remarkably few details about herself or her family'. He feels, therefore, that he needs to go beyond the circumstantial detail and depict the inner lives of his characters if he is to get to 'the deeper truths' of their lives. The issues arising from this so-called 'novelization of history' are contentious ones and far too many to be tackled here, but they are central to *The Spinster and the Prophet*. Suffice it to say that whilst the historian Stephen Schama in *Dead Certainties* (a book McKillop cites in his preface) treats history as fiction and produces a successful novel based on an historical incident, and postmodernist novelists cheerfully present actual events and historical figures in a wholly fictional format (in *Ragtime*, for instance, E.L. Doctorow has Freud and Jung take a ride in the Tunnel of Love at Coney Island!) the author of *The Spinster and the Prophet* veers between these two approaches. Thus when he writes as a professional historian – on the publishing practices in Canada in the nineteen twenties and thirties, for example, or on the details of the legal proceeding – the book is both interesting and persuasive; every detail is meticulously referenced, every claim supported. But in the more speculative 'novelized' passages, particularly where the past-historic gives way to the present tense and we are told, for instance, precisely what Jane Wells is thinking and feeling about her marriage as she sits in the garden at Easton Glebe 'on a cool late-Autumn morning in 1916', or exactly how the manuscript arrived on Wells's desk in 1918, the narrative loses all credibility.

In its attempts to make out a case for Florence Deeks, *The Spinster and the Prophet* seeks to diminish H.G. Wells by presenting him as 'a vast sponge that absorbed any work or any person that served his purpose'. But it does not work. Wells's relations with women were less one-sided and far more complex than McKillop allows, and his great abilities as a writer are undervalued. Nonetheless I

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