HISTOIRES DE DIRE
Josiane Lapointe et Pauline Voisard.

PAR JEANNE MARANDA


“Vidéo-femmes” en produisant ce documentaire poursuivait trois objectifs. D'abord faire prendre conscience de la difficulté qu'éprouvent les femmes atteintes du VIH à révéler cette maladie à leur entourage. Ensuite il leur fallait démystifier l'image que l'on se fait du SIDA en présentant des femmes non-marginales. Tout en poursuivant le message de prévention, il s'agissait aussi de donner l'espoir en présentant les nouvelles données médicales concernant cette maladie.

Cette vidéo a été primée au “festival Yorkton du court metrage et vidéo” en mars 2001 au Manitoba et les réalisatrices ont remporté le prix du jury à Téléfilm, une bourse de $2000 remise au meilleur court metrage.

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THE SPINSTER AND THE PROPHET:
FLORENCE DEEKS, H.G.WELLS, AND THE MYSTERY OF THE PURLOINED PAST


BY CLARA THOMAS

A mystery story without a murder but with enough page-turning suspense to satisfy the most jaded who-dunit fan. An exercise in enraging confirmation of the deepest, darkest of feminists’ prejudices against male power structures. A tour de force by a well-respected Carleton Professor of History. The Spinster And The Prophet is all of these, offering also the bonus of a cracking good read!

As McKillop tells us in his Préface, he was enticed into examining this once-sensational case by a footnote mentioning “the Deeks versus Wells papers” during his research on the historian, Frank Underhill. These papers turned out to be in the holdings of the Toronto Public Library, while a huge archive of Wells papers was deposited at the University of Illinois. Scentsing buried treasure, McKillop embarked on his challenging quest—the untangling of the mysterious events linking these two most unlikely individuals, a world-famous author and a shy Canadian spinster.

Wells’ two-volume The Outline Of History was published by MacMillan in 1920. Immediately it became a best-seller, renowned throughout the English-speaking world, published in separate editions by both the American and the Canadian branches of the firm. It had been written, so its author said, between the end of WWI in November of 1918, and the beginning of its first serial publication in November of 1919, a sweeping survey of some 250,000 words, and a well-nigh impossible feat even for the fast and prolific author that Wells had often proved himself to be.

For her part, Florence Deeks had worked throughout the years of WWI to write a history of the world with special emphasis on women, and their prime importance to the course of history. She called the resulting lengthy manuscript The Web, timidly, using the pseudonym Adul Weaver, she submitted it to the Methodist publishing house and J.M. Dent and sons. When both of these companies politely turned it down and returned it to her, she screwed up her courage once again and submitted it to Macmillan. When she bought at Eaton’s Wells’s best-seller
Outline and read it, her own manuscript had been returned to her with a recommendation for radical revising, but not before Macmillan had held it for more than six months. Therein lay the cornerstone of her case against Wells. Totally convinced of his use of her own work in his published Outline, she adopted the vindication of her convictions as her lifetime mission and throughout the decades of a long life, she did not relinquish her purpose.

Intriguingly, McKillop layers the biographies of Deeks and Wells to take us on parallel paths through the lives and works of two people whose lives could hardly be more disparate. Wells, a poor boy who made good, was thirty years old, having spent most of her twenties, she said later, in travelling in Europe and America, having enlisted to give their opinions on her manuscript, and it was Norman Tilley, who had a reputation as Ontario’s finest litigator, who acted on her behalf when the case first came to trial.

Throughout, it is obvious that McKillop, having painstakingly researched the whole case, firmly believes in the validity of Deeks’ accusations. Unproven though it is and will remain, her manuscript travelled across the Atlantic to Wells at a time when he could and did use it for the work that above all ensured his fame and wealth. A Canadian Macmillan functionary must have been the agent, and suspicion rests strongly on Frank Wise, founding president of Macmillan of Canada, whose later conviction for forgery and imprisonment were quite divorced from the Deeks case. McKillop’s even-handed treatment of all the tortuous byways of the case is a tour de force, as is his sketching of the context in which each of its principals lived. Biographers had long since unmasked the unscrupulous Wells, though always stressing his personal, not professional sleaziness; no one had memorialized Florence Deeks as McKillop has done, bringing her back among us in all her stubborn early feminism, naïveté, and rectitude.

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